

GOD'S Love

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*The Key To
Successful
Relationships*

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Outskirts Press, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

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Outskirts Press, Inc.
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-4327-5154-8

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Introduction

Today we live in a world that still yearns for the most meaningful element in life, genuine love. Even though we have made great advances in the fields of technology, science, and medicine, mankind still seems to miss what is most important and that is loving GOD, then his or her neighbor as themselves. Wouldn't it be grand if everyone in the world loved one another unconditionally? There would be no more wars, everybody would have plenty, and no one would be denied healthcare. We would be much safer on our streets, and our quality of life would be so much better because all of our relationships would be richer. The divorce rate would be zero and care for children would be supreme as well as our homes, hence our communities stronger. What a beautiful world that would be.

We may never reach that utopia but we can get close, if not for the whole world, we can obtain that goal for our country. If not for our country we can for our state, if not for our state then for

our city. If not for our city then for our community; if not for our community then for our church. If not for our church then for our family and if not for them then we can achieve this love for ourselves. I have written this book in an attempt to help others stray from the many mistakes that I have made in my quest for finding true love and that special someone in my life. I believe the key to obtaining that unique love relationship, as well as others, is to understand and have GOD'S love in our hearts. Not your brand of love, mine, or your next-door neighbor's, but GOD'S. In this book we will journey through the many types of love, exploring the different facets of them while identifying much of the meaning of GOD'S true love.

The chapters and subparagraphs of this book have been aligned to paint you a simple picture of love that is depicted in a concise, concentrated, and easy-to-read format so that you may readily refer to it for help. The accompanying Bible scriptures have been highlighted so that you may memorize them as this will aid your faith in GOD as it applies to your love relationships. Footnotes have been added as an encouraging reminder of important thoughts that will help keep you focused while living out what you have learned. There will also be end-of-chapter exercises that will help you to apply the principles you've obtained to your everyday living. I encourage you to take full advantage of them, for these experiences will prove to increase your ability to expand with the knowledge of this work.

Now be blessed on your newfound quest to obtain love in a way that you previously haven't as you experience *GOD'S Love—The Key to Successful Relationships!*

The Dilemma

“she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and knew that they were naked...” Genesis 3:6-7

Since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden our perception and experience of love have become distorted and perverted. Love in the world as most people call it is not really love but lust, seeking its own gratification from all those who come into contact with it. Therefore, we cannot assume that everyone who uses the word love really knows how to give it; on the contrary, most of us who use the word love know very little about it. Oftentimes we feel or sense fragments of love such as the emotions of caring, happiness, or joy but the whole of love many if not most people don't have a clue as to what it really means or how to experience true love as well as express it.

Hence this presents a modern-day dilemma that our world as well our ancestors have chosen to ignore, content rather to exist in our own self-gratifications and lusts as opposed to finding the true

riches of love. The problem now is that mankind believes that it knows what love is when it really doesn't. This equals deceit. Humanity now believes that sex without marriage, homosexuality, abortion, and even hurting one another are all manifestations of the word love, when in reality these are only the results of a perverted misconception of the word. I could write a book on the travesties alone caused by our lack of knowledge concerning the emotions of love versus lust. Atrocities such as parents killing their own children, spouses consenting to having sex outside of their marriages, or lovers murdering each other as well as a host of other examples that are perhaps endless. It is apparent that the fallout from these erred relationships has caused our society to crumble, for we see the fragments of their destruction all around us. People living in continual guilt and depression, suffering with sexually transmitted diseases, carrying the burden of unwanted pregnancies, the list could obviously go on. However, the aim of this work is not to just identify a problem and its results but to offer a solution that can solve our predicament.

As in the process of any cure or recovery those who are suffering must first admit that they are sick and are in need of help. So it is with mankind—we must first admit to ourselves individually as well as collectively that we are sick and in error when it comes to the emotion of love. That we need help from the Maker and Creator of love, which is GOD, our Heavenly FATHER in and through Jesus the Christ. For GOD has said that HE is love.

**“He that loveth not knoweth not GOD; for GOD is love.”
I John 4:8**

We cannot continue to grope in the darkness and believe in obvious and gross deception, but we must confront it with the knowledge that GOD gives us through HIS Word. Does it really make sense that GOD would join two men together in marriage?

Is it really right to kill unborn babies? Is sex before marriage truly good for mankind? No matter how much we try to justify our answers, what is right before GOD is apparent and inescapable. At some point in time we (I, you) if not the whole world, must face reality, the truth that lust is not love, and decide to have the better rather than the worse.

GOD knows the truth concerning all things including love. If we really want to experience it we must come to HIM through HIS Word and ask HIM how to receive it. What does not align itself with HIS Word is not truth and what is not truth is a lie or deceit. True love must not contain deceit, lies or deception, for true love must be pure. It must be full of honesty, trustworthy so that those involved may be able to rely upon it. We must accept the fact that truth only comes from GOD whether we understand it or not. It's like the five-year-old girl who asks her father if she can drive and he says no for all the obvious reasons that are unknown to the little girl. Whether she understands the truth or not she must accept it for her own good. The truths you will learn throughout this study will hopefully help you on your quest in finding true love for yourself. A lifelong relationship that will weather any storm and flourish as GOD intended. Certainly practicing these truths will not be the easiest way out but the best way. I encourage you to study well and apply what you've learned to your life so that you may reap the benefits thereof.

LOOKING FOR A MATE

The question is often asked, "What do men really want in a relationship?" The answer is the same as it is for women; we are all seeking love. Both men and women are looking for the person who they can spend the rest of their lives with, in a fulfilling, self-perpetuating love relationship. The difference is that men look for love in ways that differ from women.

From childhood boys are treated and trained to act differently than their female counterparts. While boys are guided into sports, which help them become more proficient at their physical skills, girls on the other hand are encouraged to build their nurturing, communicative, mental, and emotional traits through playing with dolls, reading, etc. The result is that men become more physically oriented, meaning they oftentimes relate to the world around them in a very physical way. Whereas women relate to the world around them in a more communicative, mental, and emotional way because that is the way they have been trained. This, of course, does not mean that either sex does not possess the traits of their counterpart; it just means that the basis, the foundation for a man seeking a woman, will derive from physical ways as opposed to a woman, whose relationship probably won't. Her attraction to a man will derive from her ability to connect with him through her communication, her mental and emotional attributes and their ability to nurture each other. Hence we can see the reason why a man looks for love through physical stimulation, what his eyes can see (beauty), what his body can touch (her body), because he was raised to be physical in his environment. Women on the other hand are attracted to how a man looks at or speaks to her (how he communicates with her), what he has (how he can nurture her), and how he will treat her emotionally because that is how women are reared.

Inherently there is very little wrong with how we have been trained to look for love as men and women in our culture. The problem comes when lust enters the picture. The word lust means the act of wanting more and more, which is sin. When lust enters a relationship it pollutes a process that was otherwise pure. Take the couple who has been dating for a few months and they feel like they are beginning to fall in love so they begin to engage in premarital sex. They have now introduced lust, which is sin, into an otherwise pure relationship which now begins to pollute the courtship. All

of a sudden each person becomes dependent upon the other for sex as opposed to remaining independent until marriage so that they can properly evaluate the relationship on a continual basis. The result will be each person taking from the other, seeking their own personal gratification until they suck the other person and their relationship dry of attributes that are genuinely indicative of true love.

Oftentimes men, out of their desire to connect physically with their environment, will seek to become physically intimate with the woman they are dating. As soon as she gives in, their relationship is polluted and their courtship is short-circuited. A woman, out of her desire to nest and be nurtured may find herself lusting after men who have things that can never fulfill her, and after the man has given her all that he can, he may feel empty and used, left perhaps with a desire to exit the relationship. We see, therefore, that no matter what form lust has taken, whether it is sex, money, power, control, etc., it pollutes it, making the relationship impure so that it will not reach that pure standard of love as it comes from GOD.

The question is asked, "Can we fix it once we have made it impure? Why can't we just get married after having premarital sex?" The answer is found in the word sin. Lust introduces sin into the relationship, and the Word of GOD says that the wages of (payment for) sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin kills everything it is involved in, including dating relationships. You can no more clean up your polluted relationship than Adam and Eve could reverse the damage they did in the Garden of Eden when they introduced sin into the world. This is why it is so important for us while we are seeking love that we obey what GOD has said as opposed to what our minds, bodies or emotions may be telling us.

"For the wages of sin is death..." Romans 6:23

Although the above may be true, there is perhaps a way that a wayward relationship can be salvaged. Since the true essence of the question is whether genuine love exists in the relationship, the couple can find this out by removing the element of lust from it. If the man and the woman want to see if they have the love in their relationship that will sustain and cause a marriage to flourish, let them go without engaging in premarital sex for at least six months. If they have been living together, let them separate for the same period of time so that they may remove the potential lust that a woman may have for what the man has or even vice versa. I'm sure there are many other elements of lust that one could try to remove during this time period to determine if one truly does love the other. The ones I've just mentioned, however, seem to be the two main sources of lust that cause people to go astray in their relationships.

PERSONAL PREFERENCES

Note: Personal preferences and requirements for attraction are conditional; love (true GOD-given, agape love) is unconditional.

I believe that it is acceptable to have personal preferences, requirements if you will, that will lead you to become attracted to a person of the opposite sex. These are personal conditions under which you may consciously or unconsciously allow yourself to enter into a relationship. This however, is the beginning—one, of course, must look deeper into an individual to discover true love, which is unconditional. At some point in time the couple must grow in love to the point where they realize that no matter what, they love each other until the end. This is unconditional love.

Note: What you are attracted to for lust, may be a totally different criteria than what may attract you for love.

When I was in lust I was attracted to the certain body types of the women of my interest. However, when I stopped living in lust, I became attracted to women who fit a different physical makeup. A woman who was always attracted to men of wealth and power while she was in lust may very well be attracted to men of less fortune while seeking love.

CHAPTER 1 EXERCISE

1. Look into past relationships for manifestations of lust that have introduced sin into those relationships (whether they are familial relationships, friendships, as well as those that are intimate).
2. Come to the truth that this type of behavior is not conducive to your finding the true GOD-given love in all of your relationships.

What Love Is Not: Lust

Up until now we have only touched on the word and concept of lust. Now we will exhaust the subject in an effort to shed light on its deception so that we may be delivered from it. This word in the Bible means to have an inordinate affection for something. Inordinate within the context of this definition means to have a desire for something that GOD has forbidden us to have. Since God has forbidden us to have whatever it is that we are lusting for, the experience of the lust becomes fulfilling only temporarily. Therefore, the lust has to be experienced over and over, making the person insatiably addicted. This word lust fits perfectly into the concept of sin because it takes from and destroys everything it comes into contact with. Therefore, lust feeds and fuels sin in that it needs more and more lust to support what sin has taken away and destroyed. Hence the vicious cycle of sin. A person will find themselves using drugs and after the high is over they are left with the grim reality of life without the euphoria and whatever loss the drug use has made the person suffer. The person then yearns again for the high of the drugs to lift him or her from the despair that the very same drugs have caused.

How then does this affect our relationships? Oftentimes we initiate and/or find ourselves in relationships that are centered on lust. Since lust is a sin it brings destruction to all that it influences. Therefore, it is contrary to the very thing we are seeking in our relationships, which is pure love. Hence we must rid ourselves of one to have the other, for lust cannot peacefully coexist with love in the same relationship.

Note: To lust is sin.

“But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Matthew 5:28

As surely as sin is in our world we have been trained to lust after everything from food to cars, money to sex, from popularity to power. The world’s system of life is based upon lust, then sin, then lust some more until you sin again and on and on again. How do we rid ourselves of this infectious cycle as well as free our relationships from the chains of lust? First we must identify its source. Then we must ask GOD to forgive us and cleanse us from it. We then must renounce our ties with it and do our best to walk free from lust, knowing that it is only a destructive force in our lives.

IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE

Lust enters our lives in varied amounts and forms, for any given set of reasons. A person could have a lust for money because his or her family was extremely poor as that person grew up. Another person could have a lust for sex out of a lack of love and affection from their home. Whatever the lusts and whatever the reasons, we have now become responsible and accountable to ourselves and to GOD for all that we are, including how we handle the lusts of our lives. You might look into your life and find lust in the form of

control, substance abuse, power, popularity, sex, love for money, or a host of other things. As a result you may be able to look into your love relationships to see how these lusts have ruined or at least strained good healthy relationships that you have been and are in.

Note: Lust is never perpetually self-fulfilling, only pleasurable temporarily.

You must then confess to the truth that those experiences of lust do not bring love but, on the contrary, cause the very thing you were seeking (love) to die. It matters not what form lust has taken; once it enters into a relationship it will cause it to die. Since lust is not fulfilling there is this constant feeling of lack until it is experienced again to bring its momentary pleasure. This is one of the most debilitating effects of lust that a person can experience. As the couple who decides to have premarital sex find pleasure during the sex but dissatisfaction while they are not, they then find themselves wanting more and more sex to bring them temporary pleasure until they exhaust themselves and the relationship they are in. Once they have introduced lust and sin into the courtship, the union begins to die and there is very little they can do to stop it. It is better to never allow lust in, via whatever form it has taken to enter into the relationship.

REPENTANCE

Once you have identified the source of your personal lusts and the damage it has caused your relationships, you must then begin the road to recovery. The first step is to admit to GOD and yourself the areas of your lusts, then ask HIM to forgive and cleanse you from those sins in the name of Jesus. The sinless blood of Jesus was given to us by GOD to wash and cleanse us of our sins so that we could live our lives afresh and free from our past lusts and sins.

We must then commit our lives to GOD in Christ, living a lifestyle free from the lusts and sins that have previously corrupted our relationships. This doesn't mean that we will become perfect overnight. It does mean, however, that you will be empowered by GOD to begin a new life, one that will be filled with the knowledge and experience of GOD to battle the lusts of your past.

RENOUNCING SIN

The next step we should take in our effort to recover from the effects of lust in our lives is to renounce the pleasures we gained and the part we played in the acts of lust we participated in. Oftentimes people realize the results of the detrimental behavior and desire to change as though they are the victim and not responsible for the very actions that have caused them their loss. As the late Flip Wilson used to say, "The devil made me do it." Well, the truth is the devil can't make us do anything; he can only suggest things to us. GOD gave us the right to choose even to the point where we can neglect to serve HIM. Why then would HE, our CREATOR, say that we have no choice when it comes to battling the temptations of the devil. The truth is we do have a choice and we choose sinful behavior because it gratifies us in some way or another. We must admit this and stop acting like victims of some spiritual force or disease that we cannot combat, but as a Christian we are more than conquerors through Christ, who loves us.

"Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through HIM that loved us." Rom 8:37

Therefore, we must be responsible Christians and admit our affinity for and the part we played in the lusts that destroy our lives. We then must choose not to like, be familiar with, or participate in those lusts anymore, for we know that they will wreak havoc on our lives again. This will then render the lust powerless in our

lives because there is no longer deception to hide its reason for existing. A person may believe in premarital sex for their dating relationships because of the deception of the sex feeling good. However, after many failed unions, a few sexually transmitted diseases, and a couple of unwanted pregnancies, that same person will probably see the full truth of why premarital sex is not the way to go versus the deception of the sex just feeling good.

Whatever the lust, look back at your past relationships and see where they have led you. Certainly you are ready for a change or you wouldn't be reading this book. You must now change your mind, your way of thinking about the lusts that you have liked and have participated in. Instead of thinking of them in a positive manner, see them for what they are in your life, destructive. Realize that the sinful behavior you engage in may feel good but causes you too many problems to continue practicing the same behavior. Then make up in your mind that you no longer like those lusts and want them in your life because of the destruction they have caused.

Once you have given yourself a reason for no longer having an affinity for the lusts in your life, you will begin to unbalance the scale of decision-making in your life to your favor. This will empower you in times of temptation, for you have already said to yourself and the lusts that you no longer like them nor want them in your life. Now in your time of temptation you can review that decision with all the facts of how detrimental that or those particular lusts have been and that you no longer want that cycle to continue in your life. Now all that lies on the other side of the scale of choice during this time of temptation is that it will feel good for a few moments. Are you willing to sacrifice lifelong love and happiness for temporary pleasure that will cause destruction in your life? That's the choice you will have to make.

And that's all it will be because you will no longer feel bound to be made to do something that you do not want to do, for Christ Jesus has freed you and released you from that enslavement. In addition to this you have renounced it, forever walking away from the shackles that held you imprisoned.

COMMITTING TO CHANGE

The last step is to commit your life to following Christ in a lifestyle of change. The key word in this particular part of the process is the word commit. Commitment here means to make a decision for change that will stand through tough and tempestuous times. I focus on this word because many people within Christendom feel that even though you have made a meaningful decision for change, when you slip and make a mistake or have a relapse, they feel that erases the commitment you initially made. This is not so. Your road, my road, anyone's road to change is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash. Hence our journey toward total freedom and deliverance from past lusts will be filled with victories and occasional defeats from the many battles we will face in this war against the enemy and our flesh. What we must understand is that no setback can annul our decision for change in Christ even though we may feel so weak that we no longer have the strength to carry on. It is in times like these that the commitment to Jesus we have made causes HIM to give us the desired help to sustain us in our time of need. As in the famous poem "Footprints in the Sand" our decision for Jesus causes Him to come, pick us up, and carry us in times when we can no longer carry ourselves. Therefore, let us focus on the pure heart of our decision and the decisions of other Christians for change and not the triumphs or mistakes we will all inevitably make. For our deliverance should never be attributed to ourselves but to the One who set us free. That being the case, why should we dwell on our personal defeats or the defeats of our fellow brethren?

Instead let us join hand in hand in support of one another's cause of finding love free from lust. For it is in this love that we will have a life-fulfilling trait from GOD that will show the world we are in HIM and HIM in us, for we love one another.

"That they may all be one, as THOU, FATHER, art in Me, and I in THEE, that they may be one in US; that the world may believe that THOU hast sent Me. And the glory that THOU hast given Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are One; I in them and THOU in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that THOU hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as THOU hast loved Me." St. John 17:21-23

CHAPTER 2 EXERCISE

1. Review your life as well as current and past relationships to identify patterns of lust and sinful behavior.
2. Repent — Ask GOD through Jesus the Christ to forgive you and cleanse you from those patterns of lust and sins that you participated in.
 - Forgive others of their sins against you.
3. Renounce — admit the part you played in those lustful patterns and sinful behaviors, also your affinity for them.
 - Decide that you no longer have a desire for those lustful patterns and sinful behaviors, that you no longer want them in your life.
 - Vocally express (confess) this and tell all of those lustful patterns and sinful behaviors to go, to leave your life, and to never return again, in the name of Jesus, that they are no longer welcome in or near your person.

- Each time temptation comes confess that you are free and delivered in the name of Jesus from whatever lust that had you bound. Even when you are not being tempted it is good to make these verbal confessions, which will build up your new spiritual man or woman while tearing down the old.
- Praise GOD in the name of Jesus for setting you free!

What GOD'S Love Is

**“He that loveth not knoweth not GOD; for GOD is love.”
I John 4:8**

The Word of GOD says that GOD is love. This means that in its purest sense, love is the very nature of GOD. Hence it should be our desire to discover love in its purest sense, undefiled and free from perversion as GOD intended for us to experience and enjoy. It is this kind of love that will lift up and edify our children, encourage our friends, make us one with our lifelong mate, and most of all connect us to GOD our Heavenly FATHER through Jesus Christ HIS Son. This love, which only GOD can show us how to give, is what we all are so earnestly searching for. Our world is filled with many counterfeits of love, which leaves a vacuum within our society that only GOD can fill.

Note: Love gives, lust takes.

The Greek word for love in the Bible is *agape*, which means to have a sacrificially giving love. It's the same type of love that Jesus had for us when He sacrificed His life for us on the cross

of Calvary. GOD'S love, therefore, is in direct opposition to the world's counterfeit called lust, for lust takes more and more seeking its own gratification, while love continually gives to the point of sacrificing one's own self. This is the type of love that is truly fulfilling.

Note: Love is unconditional.

Just imagine falling in love with someone so deeply that no matter what they did you still loved them unconditionally. That your only desire was to give to that person, and that in itself brought you pleasure. Sounds like a love from a parent for their child. The father and mother love the child no matter what the child does because they love the child unconditionally. The parents find pleasure simply in giving to the child all of their expressions of love, for the child as an infant has very little to give back to its parents. Hence parents will continually give sacrificially to their children until their children are able to give back to them. It is this type of love that GOD intends for you to experience, enjoy, and give in most of the relationships that you are and want to be in. However, many are afraid to enter into this kind of sacrificial, unconditional love because of past pain and/or the fear of it (their love) being abused.

Certainly from the world's perspective there are many inherent dangers in loving someone with GOD'S love, all stemming from one apparent cause. A person could perhaps be in love with GOD'S pure, agape love, yet the person being loved could be in lust, draining the other of everything he or she possesses to the point of death. This, of course, is not the will of GOD. The answer to this dilemma is that both persons in the relationship must be in agape love and secondly that both persons have to know GOD for themselves, for love comes from HIM.

How is it that we know how to get milk from a cow and fish from the sea, yet we do not know how to go to GOD for love from which all love flows? Certainly we cannot give something we do not possess and possess something we haven't any idea where to obtain it. The source of pure love is GOD, for HIS Word says that GOD is love. HE has it; therefore we must come to HIM to obtain it. Once we know HIM and come to HIM, HE will give us the agape love we need to give to others. Once we experience HIS sacrificial, unconditional, and undying love we can then give it to others. Love between engaged couples or husbands and wives will then be able to stand the test of time, trials, and temptations. Prevailing over them because they are experiencing the sacrificial, unconditional, and undying love that GOD is renewing day by day in their lives, as HE is their source.

Once you have GOD'S love emanating in and through your life you can not only begin to experience HIS love for yourself, you can share it with others as well. You will be able to do so even at the expense of yourself. Remember, the world's love (lust) takes at the expense of those it says it loves. This causes a vicious cycle of death because there is no regeneration of those that lust has taken from. Hence the objects of lust dry up, wither, and die from a lack of true love. On the other hand those who have GOD'S love emanating from them have HIS regenerating source abiding within. So when you give from GOD'S love within you, HIS perpetual love source replenishes what you gave out continuously so that you can give again. Now you no longer have to be afraid of sacrificially giving at your expense because you have an endless supply of love from GOD that dwells within you. Not only will you be empowered to love others with a love that won't exhaust you, you will also possess a love that actually gives you more life the more you give. The more you give GOD'S love away the more HE will restore you so that you can again give more love away. So instead of living in a vicious cycle of lust that leads only to confu-

sion, disillusionment, and destruction, you would now be living in the blessed state of life tending only to eternal life.

Jesus said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto The FATHER, but by Me." John 14:6

The question then is "How do I get to know GOD so that I can experience HIS love?" The answer is through HIS Son Jesus, the Christ. His name means *Jehovah saves*, for the Bible says that He would save us from our sins. Obviously there are many religions claiming to point the way to GOD, The ALMIGHTY. However, there is only one GOD Man who came to this earth and spoke about heaven and GOD, who died, then actually arose from the dead and ascended to heaven to be with GOD, and that was Jesus Christ. It is He who has led the way to heaven, where GOD dwells, and Him only, for He said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the FATHER except through me." Now we either accept this truth by faith and experience GOD'S love, or reject it based upon our own fears and doubts and continue to live in this world without HIS love. Perhaps there is an endless supply of unanswered questions that many have as to whether or not Jesus is GOD'S Son. This book was not written with the intent of answering those questions but to lead you to GOD'S love. Hence you will never arrive there swaying in the winds of indecision. Meeting GOD simply takes faith, believing in what HE said for your life. It's like the television set—I don't know how it works, and I don't have to. I only have to believe it will work enough for me to turn it on and then I will be able to benefit from it. You don't have to understand everything about GOD to believe in HIM. It is GOD WHO has said that if we would believe upon what HIS Son Jesus did on the cross for us, died and arose from the grave, and give ourselves to HIM, then we would become born again, saved from death to live life with GOD for eternity. Once you commit

your life to this truth, then you will begin a life of knowing GOD, communing with HIM so that HE can share HIS love with you.

SACRIFICIAL LOVE

“For GOD so loved the world that HE gave HIS only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

The Word of GOD says, “For GOD so loved the world that HE gave...” It also says, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Here the Word of GOD teaches us that true love is enjoined with sacrificial giving, something that many in our me-oriented society are either afraid to realize or at the very least are ignorant of. However, from GOD’S point of view love isn’t really love until you are willing to sacrifice all for it. Obviously this places lovers in vulnerable positions, but that is what relationships are all about, knowing each other in such closeness that one becomes vulnerable to the other. We also must take into account that no one person is perfect; therefore, those we love and fall in love with will do things that will disappoint and/or hurt us. If we train and educate ourselves to this fact beforehand we will not be overwhelmed when our loved ones behave in ways that we either don’t agree with or that are just plain wrong. When the prevailing, underlying current of our relationship is true love, everything in the relationship that is contrary should pale in comparison to it. Of course there will be times when occurrences arise that will test that love. However, when we are properly prepared to deal with those adverse circumstances we will not find ourselves aborting relationships because of an inability to handle each other’s imperfections.

Note: Love sacrifices.

It is also important to emphasize that pure love from GOD'S perspective sacrificially gives to the intent that we would have HIS best, and GOD'S best for our lives is eternal life. Therefore, if we are going to truly love our spouse, fiancé(e), and those around us, we must be in love with them to the point where we will sacrificially give to them so that they will receive the best. What better gift could we give to our loved ones than eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, everything we do should be done with HIS eternal backdrop of love emanating from us so that others may see GOD living through our lives and receive HIM into their own.

Here we can see the foundation of our love is GOD and not another person. We love because GOD loves us, not because other people are this or that or do this or that for us. Love comes from within, where GOD dwells; it is not caused from without, where other people are. Once we know GOD, HE comes to live from within. HE then shows us how to sacrificially love because HE does, to the intent that we and those we love would have HIS best. We then are not afraid to sacrifice for others because we know we have GOD as our source, from within, which never will die or run out. His love is, therefore, perpetual, replenishing and refreshing us as we give it to others. Hence we can take risks of love such as giving continual forgiveness for being sinned against or mistreated, the risk of our love not always being reciprocated or even at times abused, because we have GOD as our eternal source of love.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Unconditional love simply means loving someone without condition. In the context of dating or meeting a potential spouse it is very

important to remember this principle. When we are in lust we have certain preferences, criteria if you will, for what we like in a person. However, when searching for the love of our lives that GOD intended for us to love unconditionally, those potential people may fit a whole different set of criteria. In other words for you to love someone unconditionally GOD may very well attract you to someone who is without or outside your conditions for being attracted.

This is why it is so important for you to know GOD and the way in which HE guides you. If you have ever fallen in love (not lust) then you will probably get a picture of the type of people that you may potentially fall in love with. These are people you would have the type of love for, that no matter what they did you would still love them, which is unconditional love. I don't believe that the person you love should be criminal or continuously abusive in their response to your love. I do, however, believe that true love will cover a multitude of faults and go on loving that person until they are healed from their sins and the issues that have caused them. Again the source of our unconditional love is GOD, not the person we love. This then enables us to draw from HIS resources from within, not only from those who are outside of our being to deal with ills that are in our relationships. Because unconditional love is based on loving someone for no reason (condition), our only reason for loving that person is GOD, for HE is The ONE WHO caused us to love that person. The conditions that the person we love provides us mean very little then in comparison to our love for them because our love for them was not based upon conditions in the first place. Therefore, our love for them will always flourish, refresh, replenish, and be perpetual because it is not based upon conditions but is based upon The GOD WHO is continually expressing love to and through us.

Certainly this is the type of love that we need for our fiancé(e), spouse, and those around us, one that is from heaven and is

able to meet all of our needs, even those we are unaware of. A love that is based upon conditions is limited to the person doing the loving, and that will not be enough love to love someone beyond their faults and/or sins. This is why love cannot be based upon our conditions, because the one we love will sin or have faults beyond our conditions that we will not be able to cover with our love. This is why we will need a greater love, a love that is unconditional. A love that will endure even though our mate has fallen in their own drunkenness, broken something in rage, or squandered the family savings account. Unconditional love came before all of those things ever happened and will sustain the couple until they are restored. Unconditional love is our foundation in any relationship and GOD is the source of that love.

I believe it is vital for both husband and wife in a married relationship to be in pure agape love with each other for the relationship to be truly fulfilling. For this to take place people must wait for GOD to give them this type of love for a person. We cannot choose whom we are going to love. It is our Heavenly FATHER WHO will choose whom we will love until death do us part. In a world that has little patience, a great temptation is not to wait until we have found that person whom we will love sacrificially and unconditionally. But the alternative would be to exist in a relationship with our cup of love partially filled as opposed to running over. GOD wants us to have the most fulfilling relationship possible on this earth; therefore, HE knows the perfect person for us, whom we should be in union with. Both people will be the perfect love for the other, which will cause a spiritual love reaction that will energize the relationship with GOD to produce a lifelong, overflowing, and perpetual love.

CHAPTER 3 EXERCISE

1. Understand and accept that GOD'S love is unconditional, self-sacrificing, and undying, that it is HIS love and that it comes from HIM.
2. Commit yourself to knowing love by knowing more of GOD through HIS Son Jesus.
3. Pray this prayer. Dear Lord Jesus, I come to You asking You to forgive me of all of my sins. I am now confessing with my mouth and believing in my heart that You lived on this earth, died on the cross, and arose from the dead for my salvation. I pray now that You will come into my heart and fill me with Your Holy Spirit so that I may know You better and experience Your love more. Thank You, Jesus, for loving me, thank You, Jesus, for saving me, thank You, Jesus, for setting me free!

The Simplicity of Love

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all of thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

In these scripture we see Jesus wrapping the complexity of the purpose of what the Jewish law and its prophets stood for in two commandments, loving GOD with everything we have and our neighbors as ourselves. If mankind could just follow these two commandments we would be pleasing to HIM. The Bible also says that if we truly love Jesus we will keep His commandments. The problem with our love then lies in our refusal to love GOD or our inability to keep HIS commandments, which are manifestations of HIS love for us.

"He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My FATHER, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." John 14:21

Many are searching for the love of GOD without wanting or refusing to love HIM. This is the same true and living GOD that Jesus came to reveal to us during His earthly ministry. But the second commandment which is to love our neighbor as ourselves, is predicated upon the first, which is to love GOD. As it has been stated before, it is impossible to give love to our neighbors if we have not received it from its source first, which is GOD, for HE has said that HE is love. For us to refuse GOD would be for us to refuse the very thing that we are seeking, true and pure love. We must accept GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ, for this is GOD'S command so that we may receive HIS love into our lives and give it to others.

As GOD has loved the whole world without discrimination, HE then commands us to love our neighbors, all of them as we would love ourselves. This is the simplicity of GOD'S love. That HE not only commands us but empowers us to love all of mankind without discrimination. He empowers us with agape love, the self sacrificing, unconditional, and undying love that HE loves us with to love others. So now we can love our fathers and mothers, our sisters and brothers, our associates and coworkers, our neighbors of all races, even those with whom we disagree as well as our enemies.

Many times people find themselves unable to love properly because they themselves have not been properly loved. Oftentimes people have been abused sexually, physically, mentally, and/or emotionally by the very people in their lives who should have been a true source of love and comfort. Hence a perverted and distorted version of love has begun to cycle its way through generations of people all claiming to love, but doing so in an evil way. Here we see once again the importance of GOD'S love. HIS version of love is pure and HIS commandments once obeyed preserve HIS love in those who obey HIM. Therefore, our acceptance of love

and our obedience to HIS commands stop the perverted distortions of love from being practiced and cycled through our lives so that pure love can be experienced. We will never truly learn how to love unless we have The MASTER of love in our hearts teaching us and expressing HIMSELF through us.

GOD'S love not only empowers us to love our neighbors unconditionally and sacrificially but also those we are considering for holy matrimony. Again it is important here that we reiterate that the process of courtship must remain pure if it is going to yield the perfect fruit of love for which it was intended.

CELIBACY

I believe remaining celibate until marriage is one of the best decisions that a single person can make in their quest for finding the love of their lives. For many reasons:

PURITY

When we refrain from sexual activity we are keeping our body, soul, and spirit from evil. When we are celibate we do not have to worry about being infected with sexually transmitted diseases that can damage our reproductive organs and/or other parts of our bodies as well as cause us premature death. We do not have to worry about an unwanted pregnancy or being responsible for an illegitimate child.

Also, we aren't going from sexual partner to sexual partner so we won't have a loose, promiscuous stigma attached to our lifestyle. However, you will have a reputation among men and women of wholesomeness that commands respect wherever you go. The energy that you would have expended through fornication would then be stored and reserved within you to produce a glow that will

cause you to succeed in all areas of your life. And because you are keeping a command of GOD, HE will be with you to bless your life.

THE MARRIAGE ACT

Sex in the Bible is an activity that is reserved for a married couple consisting of a male and a female. Anything that strays from this model is sin and is cursed by GOD. Since sex is a marriage act, those who engage in fornication (sex outside of marriage) feel tied to the person they are having sex with. This is because GOD has said that when male and female come together they become one flesh. Since two people become one flesh through sex, they feel they are one with each other. So what if the person is someone who is having sex with a criminal, a liar, and a cheat, or a womanizer? Many are in relationships that they know are bad for them and they want to get out but they can't. Why? Because they feel they are one with that person, tied together as if they were married.

Being celibate protects us from this dependence because it allows our bodies to remain separate and independent from the person we are dating. Courtship is used to find out what kind of person you are attracted to. If the person turns out to be totally off the wall and/or unacceptable to you, it will be a lot easier to end the courtship because you have not become one with them through sexual intercourse. On the other hand if you have already become sexually active with that person, chances are you will take a lot longer in time, parting ways.

When a couple decides to marry after they have been celibate for some time it says something about their future marriage, that it was not based on sex. If sex was not the reason for the couple getting married, then what was? Hopefully the answer to that

question would be love, for love far exceeds lust and rewards us in countless ways, more than its counterfeit's curses. As the couple progresses in their marriage the sexual is only an enhancement of a beautiful relationship that has other amenities that are just as powerful. This is because GOD'S pure love is the driving force in all phases of their relationship. Also, if the couple is physically separated for an extended period, for whatever reason, they will be less tempted to commit adultery because their relationship was not based on sex in the first place but on true love. And if for some reason one of the partners is unable to perform sexually, the other partner is less likely to leave the other because once again their union was not based upon sex. For they learned how to abstain, sacrificing temporary sexual pleasure for the higher calling of GOD'S love prior to their ever being married.

THE HUNT

As we stated before, men are raised to be physical in their environment and he seeks to express himself physically in relationships with the women of his interest. This is one of his greatest driving forces, his sex drive. This drive will cause him to pursue a woman he is attracted to until he can express himself to her in the physical way of sexual intercourse. So what if the woman of his interest does not give in to his sexual advances? He will then exhaust other areas of his being until he can, even to the point of falling in love and proposing marriage. But if the woman gives in prematurely, oftentimes his deep-down respect and his motivation for conquering her, if you will, is diminished. Whether it is true or not he may feel there is nothing else special about her, so he then moves on.

Here we can see that women and men who are chaste in their sexual dispositions are more attractive in the long-term hunt, for those who change sexual partners often can be had often and repeatedly with little love or respect. However, the person who

makes men or women wait for them is held in high esteem and is pursued longer and with greater vigor. If they aren't pursued in this way from those who say they are interested, then they probably weren't, just the wrong person trying to gratify their own lust.

Perhaps there are other reasons you can think of as to why celibacy is the right decision for your single life. As we stated before, lust in any form is detrimental to a courtship. I have mentioned it in its sexual manifestation because it's probably the most prevalent and most misunderstood concept in the single's world and therefore the most damaging to most marriages.

If we are going to learn to love our neighbors, relatives, and those we hope to marry, we must first learn to love GOD HIS way, for there is no other way.

CHAPTER 4 EXERCISE

1. Understand that the simplicity of love is first loving GOD with everything we have and then loving everyone else just as much as you love yourself, in GOD'S way.
2. Accept GOD'S way of loving through keeping HIS commandments.
 - If you are single, think of three good reasons to remain celibate.
 - If you can, make the decision to live celibate until you are married.
3. Identify and make the commitment to love people with whom you disagree, even your enemies, for GOD'S love is for everyone.

The Complexity of Love

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of The FATHER is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of The FATHER, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of GOD abideth forever.” I John 2:15-17

Certainly today we live in a world where love has been perverted, distorted, and in many cases misappropriated, all because of the sin that lies within us and our simple misunderstanding of the word. It would behoove us once again to look into the Word of GOD to gain instructions on who are or should be the subjects and objects of our love so that we will better know its purpose.

Note: The purpose of love is to take care of one another.

Jesus instructed us through the apostle John not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world, the things that are representative of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,

and the pride of life. Here we see GOD teaching us not to love things in this world that provide us pleasure, power, and/or status. Oftentimes we hear people associate the word love with a car, a home, a meal, the certain destination of a vacation, etc. People say, "I loved that movie," or "I love that building," or "I love that wine." This is a misappropriation of the word and concept of love and therefore sways its purpose to something that it was not designed for. This has caused mankind to waste its love on things that cannot love mankind back. Hence we see this vacuum effect of love in the world. Mankind giving their love out to a world's system that will never replenish it, sucking our societies dry, leaving many mentally, emotionally, spiritually, even physically undernourished from a lack of love.

Note: Love is designed to be experienced between GOD, all mankind, and all that HE has created, not for the things man has created.

It is often said when a person is on their deathbed, they bring to them the things that matter the most in their lives. Which are meaningful relationships that they have built over the past years of their lives. They don't ask to see the remaining balance of their checking account or for a last ride in their most adored vehicle. What they want is to be touched with the most important concept in the world, the concept of the love of GOD and the love of mankind.

Since this is so, wouldn't it make sense to focus our love on what is more important throughout the course of our lives as opposed to waiting until it has ended? Certainly if love for GOD and mankind is best for the ending of our lives, isn't it plausible to think that loving GOD and mankind during our lives is what's best for us? Why then do we choose to love things that will not love us back? Again it is because of our sinful nature and misunderstanding of the emotion of love.

Hence the purpose of this study, to enlighten us so that we will no longer be in darkness over the subject of love. Training from the Word of GOD will release us from the shackles of ignorance that have had us bound for thousands of years. Nor must we continue to follow the hype of the world's sinful system that prompts us at every move to seek love in all of the wrong places. Places that will only lead us to less of what we started out looking for in the first place, true love.

LOVING GOD'S CREATION

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly FATHER feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if GOD so clothed the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall HE not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” Matthew 6:25-30

In these scriptures we see GOD clothing the grass in the field. Certainly if GOD clothed the grass HE must have loved it enough to feed and care for it. Yet Jesus expresses HE would clothe us even more, indicating to us that GOD cares more for us than HE does for the grass in the field. The grass in the field in this scripture represents the natural environment in which we live, which GOD created through HIS Son Jesus. This is the same environment that

people seek to protect from toxic waste, pollution, and a myriad of other dangers that threaten to destroy it. Here in the scripture we see GOD caring for it; therefore, we can assume that HE loves it, and hence we can conclude that we can love it too. Yet Jesus says that HE would care for us more than HE cares for the environment, letting us know that HE loves us more than the environment and that we should love HIM and our fellow man more than our environment.

Here again if we fail to properly prioritize our love we will once again find our love going astray and missing its divine design for which it was purposed. We cannot become so consumed with saving our environment and/or loving it that we place loving GOD and mankind in lower priority. If we find ourselves placing a higher honor on a rock, tree, or on some coral in the sea more than we would on an unborn child, then something becomes seriously distorted about our love. Hence our society's culture begins to border on insanity, lost in its error of delusion, causing harm by its good.

We see also in the scriptures Jesus mentioning "the fowls in the air," that our Heavenly FATHER feeds them, indicating that HE loves them. Yes, Jesus asks the question, "Are ye not much better than they?" The fowls of the air in this verse represent the living beings on the earth that GOD created through HIS Son Jesus the Christ. We can assume that GOD loves all creatures that HE created on the earth because HE takes good care of them; therefore, it is good for us to love them as well. Yet we must not improperly prioritize our love for them over our love for GOD and mankind—to do so would also be a violation of GOD'S divine purpose for love in our lives. Certainly it is a beautiful thing to love our pets or a certain species of animal and desire to take care of them. But if we place them in a higher priority than ourselves, we place ourselves lower in nature to animals and miss the divine nature

that GOD created for us to experience. Hence we find segments of our societies acting out behaviors lower in nature than the animals they revere, holding beliefs and dogmas that even animals have sense enough not to follow.

Therefore, we cannot fall to the temptation of erring into the belief that it is more important to save whales than to save babies, or love the manatee more than GOD and our fellow man. To do so would continue to spread error like a wildfire into all phases of our lifestyles and segments of our societies, burning up truth and causing derision wherever it is allowed. Again our only remedy is to turn to GOD for instruction on love and follow those instructions to the best of our abilities.

Certainly there is nothing wrong—on the contrary, everything right—with mankind loving and taking care of the creation that GOD has placed us in, for this was the very purpose of Adam when he was placed in the Garden of Eden. However, to love HIS creation more than those whom HE created in HIS Divine Image would be sin and would cause those in our societies to suffer the hurt and pain of not knowing or loving who they really are.

LOVE'S HIGHEST PRIORITY

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all of thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Mathew 22:37-40

Here we see in the scriptures Jesus stating GOD'S highest priority for love, therefore indicating love's highest purpose in our lives. HE said to love HIM with everything we have and to love our

neighbors (fellow man) as ourselves, GOD first, and mankind as ourselves. In this we see the purpose of love is to care for GOD and one another so that we may continue in life together. For GOD life lasts forever, so HIS care for us is forever, hence the reason for salvation and eternal life. GOD calls us to love HIM so that HE may give us eternal life and love us forever. HE then commands us to give the same love to our fellow man, offering salvation to our loved ones and the world so that we can enjoy the love of GOD and one another for an eternity.

When love has been properly placed and prioritized within mankind it is protected and poised for the greatness that GOD has intended for it. People will find themselves loving GOD, other people, animals, and the environment as well as those sources loving mankind back. This creates a divine cocoon of love and preserves what GOD wants for our lives so that we may enjoy HIM and all that HE has given us.

CHAPTER 5 EXERCISE

1. Ask yourself if you are misappropriating love in your life, i.e.
 - Loving things that give you pleasure (cars, food, homes, etc.)
 - Loving things that give you power (position, sex, money, etc.)
 - Loving things that give you status (popularity, the luxuries in life, etc.)

2. If you are guilty of any of the above, are you wasting your love and/or is it draining you because it is not loving you back?

3. Resolve in your mind and heart to no longer love or say that you love these things, but to love and to confess your love for GOD, people, and HIS creation.
4. Are you not properly prioritizing your love by loving nature and/or its inhabitants more than you love GOD and/or mankind? If your answer is yes, then you are in error and are not living in GOD'S divine purpose for love that HE has planned for your life.
5. Resolve in your mind and heart to properly prioritize your love in the following order:
 - Love GOD first with all you have.
 - Love your neighbor as yourself.
 - Love GOD'S creation.

Properly Organizing Your Love

In our effort to unravel the complexity of love, we must understand that we not only have to properly prioritize our love for GOD, then for our fellow man above GOD'S creation, we must also prioritize our relationships with our fellow man. The simplicity in almost all of our human relationships is that we love unconditionally and sacrificially. The role that complexity has played in our love relationships is that we have failed to distinguish between the different loves attached to different people. Hence we have found ourselves loving a dog like we would love a person, loving a parent the same way we would love our spouse, and loving our children. Any of these instances and more would be a perversion of love, not because it is wrong to love a dog, parent, or our children but because the love relationship was improperly prioritized.

And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served yet seven other years. Genesis 29:30

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children,

because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors. Genesis 37:3

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother "Woman, behold thy son!" Then saith He to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her unto his home. John 19:26-27

In these verses we see that the human heart is capable of not only loving many individuals but loving those individuals on many different levels. Hence one can see how our love can become complex, assigning the true emotion of love to many individuals in many different ways. Yet if we are taught to realize some of the categories of love and how they work, we can then put our love relationships in their proper places so that we can love people in their proper way, fulfilling GOD'S divine plan for love in our lives.

I am quite aware that because they have been hurt by one group or category of love relationships, some people will write off that category and will take the love that belonged to that group and assign it to another. This is a perversion of love and must be avoided at all costs. For an example, a woman may have experienced pain in most if not all of her love relationships with men. In her effort to avoid pain in future love relationships, she decides to write off men altogether and becomes a lesbian instead. This is a perversion of love, a fantasy of error that will only lead that person and the society that endorses it into destruction. We can think of many other combinations of the same problem if we desire. What is important here is to state that it is improper, wrong, and sinful to write off certain groups that we should have love relationships with and assign their love to another category of love relationships. Later we will show ways in which to deal with past pain in love

relationships so that you can move on in love, in a positive way as GOD intended for you.

LOVING GOD

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all of thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

As far as loving individuals in our lives, GOD comes first. As we have seen in the scriptures, we must love HIM with everything that we have, through our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. GOD has HIS own special category within our hearts that only HE can fill. Loving HIM in the proper way will bring us great happiness, contentment, and satisfaction beyond what we could ever hope for or dream. If we do not assign HIM HIS proper place (#1) in our love relationships we will be miserable, distorted, and disoriented in all of our other love relationships. Why? Because we have not allowed The GIVER of love to express HIMSELF freely and completely in and through our lives. How can we love if we have not been loved by The ONE who created love?

LOVING YOURSELF

Oddly enough the second category on the list of love relationships is the love for yourself. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Here He is stating that we must first love ourselves before we can love someone else and secondly that we will love others in the same way that we love ourselves. Oftentimes when people have been abused by loved ones they internalize that abuse and become abusers because they are giving love in the wrong way—

the way they've received it. If a person has a selfish brand of love, they may heap upon themselves every amenity possible, yet suck everyone around them dry.

This is why it is so important to receive our love from GOD through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, through the Bible, and through the Holy Spirit. When we have been properly trained on how love works through The Maker of love we will have the broad foundation from which we can love ourselves. There are so many people loving themselves in so many wrong ways, it would be impossible to know the right way without GOD. So we must know HIM and allow HIM to teach us how to love.

Also just knowing that you come second on the list of love relationships with yourself will help you to understand how important you are to your love relationships. If you are improperly loved, how can you properly love someone else? So love yourself!!! This means taking really good care of yourself by eating well, resting properly, having the proper hygiene, living in a nice home, driving a nice car, etc. Remember, GOD wants you to have the best so that you may not only enjoy it but also share it with others.

Loving yourself not only entails taking good care of yourself but doing those things you enjoy and are gifted in. GOD has given you many talents and gifts in which HE can use you, such as in ministry, in your career and/or business, as well as your recreational time. Loving yourself is living life to its fullest, getting everything out of yourself that GOD has put in you. We were not put on this earth to do nothing, but to contribute to the world around us the beautiful gifts GOD has given us. This is why I believe we should choose a career path that we are suited for and enjoy as opposed to choosing one for monetary reasons. What you do in life, whether it is in the church or on the job, as a hobby

or volunteer work, should be an expression and an extension of who you are and should be fulfilling.

Now that we have discussed what you do and what you may have as it pertains to loving yourself, this category would not be complete without mentioning the many other relationships that will interact with your #2 category. In all of the relationships you enter into, you must understand that you come first after GOD (GOD always comes first in everything) in that relationship. Not from the perspective of getting, receiving, or even in importance but from the viewpoint that "if I am not whole in this relationship there will be no relationship." People often find themselves in love relationships where they expel their energies to the point that they can no longer function, or they go insane. They have failed to love themselves or see that the love in their lives has been replenished, to give to someone else. Oftentimes the people we are in love relationships with are not giving back to us, perhaps when we need them to. This does not mean that we should go on unloved. We must go back to our love source, which is GOD, and see to it that we replenish our love through ourselves as well. Take time out once again to commune with GOD so that HE can put back into us what we need. Sometimes it is a much needed rest or a vacation away from it all, but whatever it is you must see to it that you are loved. If you cannot, then maybe there is something wrong in that or a particular love relationship that with GOD'S direction needs correction or even termination. If there are relationships in your life that are continuously draining you of all your resources to the point you feel you have nothing else to give, then perhaps GOD is letting you know that those relationships are not from HIM or are not being handled properly. Again this is why it is so important to have a viable relationship with GOD through Christ, so that you can have HIS direction in your life as it pertains to all of your love relationships.

LOVING YOUR SPOUSE

“But from the beginning of creation GOD made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall become one flesh: so that they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore GOD hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” Mark 10:6-9

The next category of love relationships on our list of properly prioritizing is that relationship we have with our spouse or spouse-to-be. Jesus said that these two people would become one and that no one could separate them. This category of love (aside from having a divine relationship) is perhaps the most misunderstood of the rest of the categories because mankind has failed to properly place the right person in this category for themselves and has taught countless others to do the same.

First of all let me state that no one should be in this category or be considered for this category in your life for any other reason than for mutual love. Not for money, not because she is pregnant, not because he is popular or powerful. Not for any other reason than the fact that the two, man and woman, love each other and desire to spend the rest of their lives together.

Secondly we must understand that GOD knows what we need to be in love in a lifelong relationship. This is the reason we must be in constant communion with HIM while considering a mate for our lives. Remember, GOD is the one who created the institution of marriage and you for that matter; therefore, HE certainly knows what is best for you. It is important to be aware of this because we don't always know what is best for us in the long run—only GOD does. Therefore, we must be open to people who may be outside our normal or former preferences, for in them may lie true sacrificial and unconditional love, until death do us part. GOD'S

preference for lifelong love and marriage for our life may be different than our own lustful or short-term dating preferences, which most of the time will be temporary at best. Once we begin to focus on love and meet people, perhaps we will begin to notice a pattern, a profile, if you will, of people we are attracted to for lifelong love.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Colossians 3:14

And above all have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. I Peter 4:8

When considering a mate many will say that compatibility must play a substantial role in the decision-making process. While I do believe it is important, I do not believe that a couple's cohesiveness is based on how similar they are to each other but upon the gift of love that GOD has given them for each other. The Bible says that love is the bond of perfectness, meaning love will cover a multitude of faults and sins. This love will bond people (a couple in this case) together in completeness so that they become one and whole to the point of perfection in that they are fulfilling the will of GOD for their lives. The scripture does not say that both parties of the union will not sin or display behavior that is indicative of incompatibility, but it does say that pure love will make up for those sins so that the couple can remain whole, one.

DATING

The dating process is oftentimes used to see whether or not a person of the opposite sex is suitable for marriage. Unfortunately the process is abused and misunderstood in most cases, which has caused many divorces to be consummated under the theme of love and marriage. Hopefully our study can shed some light on

this concept so that we can be better prepared to date and find our lifelong partner and spouse.

Oftentimes in the dating process two people become attracted to each other, then begin seeing each other. They may even find themselves quite similar in goals and beliefs, sensing a oneness of mind, heart, and soul cultivating between them. After a period of time of growing closer together the couple decides to have premarital sex, which they believe will make them closer. It does, and now they believe (or at least feel) that they are one because they have engaged in the marriage act. Yet it has been done in an evil sense because GOD did not sanction it, being performed prior to marriage, which is the sin of fornication. Hence lust (the evil counterfeit of love) has been introduced into the relationship, clouding the focus of the dating process and polluting it to the point where its former purity can no longer be realized. Again I am not stating that premarital sex is the only lust that can infect an otherwise pure courtship; it, however, usually finds its way into the dating process along with other lusts even if it's not the main one.

A closer look at the beginning of this all too often played out scenario will aid in providing us with much needed wisdom for our future encounters of the same sort. First we must realize that there are different levels of attraction, love, friendship, and interaction that we are capable of having with the opposite sex. Hence all of these people cannot possibly be candidates for marriage. You might meet someone whom you are very attracted to physically, yet there is very little connection in any other way. This person would probably go in the love sub-category (for Spousal Love) entitled Distant Friend. You might meet another person you may be attracted to and connect with intellectually, yet you realize that this is about it. So this person could be placed in the love sub-category (for Spousal Love) of Platonic Relationships. Someone else might be ringing most of your bells in most of the right places, so

you can possibly place them in the sub-category of Close Friend. Then you find someone who is hitting home runs in all the right places so you make them your Boyfriend or Girlfriend. However, after a while you sense that there is still something missing; hence they will not be the one you will marry. Then there is that person you have placed in that sub-category of being your Fiancé(e), a place where the two of you love each other and want to spend the rest of your lives together, yet you are unsure. Something may happen during the period of the engagement that validates your apprehensions to the point where you will have to stop the wedding, and this, too, is acceptable. Then finally there is the person you mutually have sacrificial and unconditional love for, and the two of you want to spend the rest of your lives together as GOD intended, so you place them in the love category of being your Spouse.

What I want you to see in all of these examples is that you can love and interact with all of these different people on these different levels and sub-categories and not feel like you have to marry them. Yet many people do not have the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical vision to make this distinction because the focus of the dating process has been clouded by lust and/or oftentimes sex. They feel they have to be with or marry the person because they have become one physically. Hence the parties to the dating courtship can no longer be objective in their decision to place the other in the proper sub-category for which they belong. The result is our country (others perhaps) having a divorce rate higher than 50%. Due to people having gotten married simply because they were attracted to each other and had sex, or they had a few things in common and had sex, or a plethora of other reasons.

What we must understand here is that if we are going to have the proper vision to see who is really supposed to be our lifelong love and partner sent from GOD, we must try to refrain from lust and

premarital sex. Our vision must remain clear and pure if we are to see what GOD in and through Christ has to show us as it pertains to the love for our lives.

BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

For whatever reason many of us from time to time have found ourselves in relationships, married and/or unmarried, that were conceived for lustful reasons and are dying, draining the very life from one if not both participants of the relationship. One thing is for certain: if it was formed from lust, then it will only last temporarily or the couple will choose to remain imprisoned in an unfulfilling bond. If not then the couple must be prepared at some point in time for ending the relationship. If it is a union without the bonds of holy matrimony, then the parties to the relationship can perhaps exit more readily than those who are married. Being just boyfriend and girlfriend or living together normally does not constitute the higher level of commitment that marriage does, even though the couple may be sexually active. So in many cases people are more understanding and situations less complicated, which makes it more conducive for the breakup of an unmarried union.

Note: Only GOD can marry two people and only GOD can separate two people from a marriage.

However, my word of caution to those who are married is that they do not take matters into their own hands if they are for whatever reason discontent with their marriage. For marriage is a sacred vow given before GOD and even though it may be founded upon lustful reasons GOD still holds us accountable for the sacred covenant that we have made. Therefore, HE can be the only entity that separates two people who have attempted to become one in holy matrimony. Jesus said, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but

one flesh. What therefore GOD hath joined together, let no man put asunder." The emphasis here is being made that man cannot put asunder two people who have been married, only GOD can. This is made clear in the tenth chapter of the Book of Ezra.

- 1. Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of GOD, there assembled him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.**
- 2. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our GOD, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.**
- 3. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our GOD to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and those that tremble at the commandment of our GOD; and let it be done according to the law.**
- 4. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee; we also will be with thee; be of good courage, and do it.**
- 5. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.**
- 6. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of GOD, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.**
- 7. And they made proclamation throughout Israel and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves unto Jerusalem;**

- 8. And whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.**
- 9. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of GOD, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.**
- 10. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.**
- 11. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD GOD of your fathers, and do HIS pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.**
- 12. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so we must do.**
- 13. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.**
- 14. Let now all our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them that have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our GOD for this matter be turned from us.**
- 15. Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethia the Levite helped them.**

- 16. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.**
- 17. And they made an end of all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.**
- Ezra 10:1-17**

Here GOD required members of the children of Israel to separate themselves, all at one time, from the hundreds if not thousands of wives they had married because they were from strange countries. Again it is important for us to realize that it is GOD who marries us and not ourselves, that is if we want it to last until death do us part with a love that will endure through the test of time. It is also only GOD that can separate us from a marriage that we have conceived without HIS bidding. In both cases it is imperative that we listen to HIS Voice for direction, for it is HIS Voice that will lead us into the tranquil waters after the storm of a bad relationship has passed.

I urge you to take my advice, for I have been through two divorces and I now speak to you from a great deal of experience when it comes to being in relationships that were not ordained of GOD. Both of my former spouses were Christians; however, GOD had spoken to my spirit that neither of these women were my wives. I had become sexually involved with both of them previous to our marriages, which, of course, made it harder for me to separate from them. After seven years of marriage and one beloved son, I separated from my first wife and by GOD'S direction divorced her two years later. After about sixteen months of being married to my second wife, GOD told me to separate from her but that she would have to file for divorce. This left me in the position where if she decided not to get a divorce for the next fifteen years then I

would be that long without a mate or available to seek one. But I had to be obedient to GOD and allow HIM to separate me from a relationship that HE from the very beginning had forbidden me to get into in the first place. I was eventually divorced from my second wife a year later as she filed for the divorce as GOD had instructed me. We are on good terms and have gone our separate ways with little damage. Why? Because we did it GOD'S way and not our own. This is the point I'm trying to make: if we don't do it right in the beginning and the relationship is failing, at least get it right with GOD during its end. Many live under constant curses associated with divorce. If we consult GOD prior to such a decision HE will certainly guide us to a more healing and hence whole resolution to our broken relationship and or marriage.

Certainly I am not proud of my past; however, I do know that I have learned a great deal from it. Many in the church conclude that under no circumstances should anyone get a divorce. This causes many in our society to leave or not feel a part of GOD because they have ended their marriages. But GOD is a forgiving GOD and divorce is not the unpardonable sin. As you have seen in the scriptures, GOD allowed hundreds if not thousands of marriages to be dissolved at one time because those marriages did not please HIM—that's the truth. The truth also is that GOD does not allow for the divorce of (the putting asunder of) marriages by man that HE has brought together. So we all must be careful, extremely cautious in whom we marry. Then secondly, if need be even more cautious when we have to divorce.

For those who have been blessed enough to have found their spouse or fiancé(e), whom they love and are loved by, the ability to love unconditionally and sacrificially should exist. To accept each other as they are and love each other in spite of, if not even covering up, and forgiving their differences, faults, and sins. Their love is as a fountain of water springing up and overflow-

ing, refreshing and replenishing all that it touches in that couple's domain. All that is needed are the finishing instructions from the Word of GOD on the subject of the other GOD-given characteristics of love, which we will get into in the following chapter.

LOVING YOUR CHILDREN

“And for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.” Matthew 19:5

Next in our priorities of love is the category that belongs to our children. As we see in the above scripture Jesus states that parents are one. Hence we must conclude that their children, being the offspring of that oneness, are a part of the oneness of their parents. From this we can understand that a child cannot become complete or whole without their parents' care. Children left to themselves in this world would die from starvation, dehydration, adverse weather conditions, and a host of other things. Here we see the purpose of love demonstrated (which is to care for one another) when GOD gave parents to their children. We as parents must understand that because our children came from our bodies, they are a part of the oneness of our marriage. That they cannot become whole or complete without us and our care, and therefore they belong on such a high priority of love in our lives just below the love we have for our spouses.

Obviously in the world that we live in there are many broken marriages, and the children who are affected are still looking to both parents to help make them whole. Parents must understand that whether their children are living with them or not, their children still hold this high category of love in their lives. Even higher than the love reserved for the new spouse, because when the parents divorce, that category temporarily does not exist. So when parents

from a divorce are seeking a new spouse they must understand that their children, being from their oneness, are their oneness before any potential mate enters the scene. That, as we stated before, loving ourselves is the second, most important love only to our love for GOD, because if we don't exist in the relationship there will be no relationship. Our children, being a part of our oneness, must be properly cared for before all other relationships after we have been divorced (except for the one we have in Christ with GOD) because they are, in essence, us.

Does this mean that the love category we have for our spouse-to-be after a divorce will always be subordinate to our children? The answer, of course, is no. It does, however, mean that while seeking a new mate, your children have first priority when it comes to your attention, care, and resources. It also means that whoever you consider to be a lifelong love and spouse must not only love you but the rest of you, which would be your children, unconditionally and sacrificially. Again it does not matter whether your children live with you or not, your new fiancé (e) must know and love your children along with you because that is the whole of you. After GOD has blessed you and your children with this sacrificial and unconditional love from a person and you are married, then that person can take their place in the higher love category than that of your children, reserved for your spouse.

In keeping with the theme of our opening scripture for this category and understanding that it is the love of their parents that make children whole, I must say that the scripture implies that the process (in most cultures) endures beyond the age of seventeen or eighteen. In many households around the world children are forced out of their homes at the age of seventeen or eighteen whether they are ready or not. Remember, parents are given the mandate to care for their children so that they become whole, until they become one flesh (married) with a person of the opposite

sex. This indicates that they should remain in a home environment with all of the care, protection, and continued instruction from their parents that are so plentiful. It should not matter the age of the child; the home environment is the key to the process of becoming whole. Growing older and learning how to live with people in changing and adverse conditions while caring for one another is what love and life are all about, not leaving and living in a polarized world where we become first priority and anything that doesn't fit our whims is discarded as unimportant.

Muse with me, if you will, a scenario of a loving family that has a brood of children five strong. The parents decide to allow the children to leave home when they feel they are ready or when they marry. They are an average-income family with a four-bedroom, two-bath house. The children are two years apart and the first three are beyond the age of eighteen, have jobs, and have made career decisions. One has decided to go into the military after college and the other two are going to college to become a doctor and a nurse, respectively. As time passes, the other two children decide not to go to college after they graduate high school and opt to get jobs and stay at home for a while. So what we have in this home are seven adults with different ideals, career paths, and temperaments all living under one roof with the purpose of loving GOD and loving and caring for one another. What better environment to learn how to love someone sacrificially and unconditionally.

In addition to this the resources that will be available to this family will become abundant as the children chip in small amounts to help pay the bills. The children should be able to drive nice cars and wear nice clothes as well as build sizeable savings accounts and impressive credit histories prior to getting married. Also, the opportunity for lustful activity is lessened because of the presence of so many people and the constant home supervision of the parents.

I believe the list could go on another chapter as to the other benefits of allowing children to stay home until they are married or at least until they are ready to go out on their own. I hope this brief scenario will help you to follow what I believe to be the Bible plan for rearing and loving our children.

LOVING OUR PARENTS

Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Colossians 3:20

Loving our parents is the fifth category on our prioritized list when it comes to assigning our love to relationships. Certainly if one does not have a spouse and/or children, then our parents' love is prioritized in third position beneath loving ourselves. As children of our parents we get our first glimpse of love for and from our parents. It is GOD'S design that we would learn the perfect picture and pattern of love from our parents, who have learned from GOD. It is within the bounds of our homes that we are to learn to care for one another, closely interact with each other so that we can experience loving unconditionally and sacrificially. Oftentimes as we grow older the command for children to obey their parents becomes increasingly more difficult as our knowledge grows of the world around us. Yet we continue to love our parents even though we don't always agree with them. This kind of frustration, if you will, is good, the fact that we have to live by someone else's rules, obey them, and get along with them even though we don't agree with them. For we will need to live in GOD'S world and a married world that sometimes resembles the same world of the home we grew up in. So one of the most important caring actions (which is the purpose of love) from a child's perspective is to be obedient to their parents. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." John 14:21. While living under their roof, our obedience to our parents is vital

to the harmony of the home. No matter how old the child is, if they want to live at home with their parents they must obey their rules.

As we grow older and leave the home to get married and have children, our priority of love in our lives for our parents changes to fourth, then fifth as each major event comes to pass in our lives. This does not mean that we stop loving our parents or even in a sense obeying them. It does, however, mean that we love them in a different way and now have a different set of rules to live by, the ones set up in our new home. Again the scripture says, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife." This passage indicates clearly that when children begin new families they are to separate themselves from the old one. No longer as children do we have to obey our parents' rules but oftentimes we may listen to their advice. Yes, we should always be there to continually support and celebrate our love for them; however, we now have a love in our spouse and in our children that has taken higher priority that we must take care of. Any confusion in this area of reassigning the proper priority to that of our parents after we have been married and have children can be detrimental to the new marriage. It is vitally important that the new couple be allowed to separate completely from their old immediate families so that they can begin a new life, one for themselves.

With that said, time may pass when our parents need our aid financially, socially, etc., and we, of course, must be there for them as they have been there for us. There may come a time when one or both of them can no longer take care of themselves and need for someone else to care for them. That is the purpose of love, to possess the actions that will take care of one another. This is the time when the children of the aging parents should step in and bring Mom and/or Dad home to be cared for until they go home, hopefully to be with our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. I don't believe except in extreme cases in placing our parents in nursing

homes. I believe it can be lonely there and even cruel. Why on earth would we want to send someone we love to such a place, because it may inconvenience us if we do otherwise? Well, that is what loving relationships are all about, sacrificially giving and unconditionally loving.

Muse again with me, if you will, a scenario of bringing your aged parents home to live with you at the ripe old age of sixty-five. You may still have children in the home. So when you are away they can watch the children and help around the house with whatever chores they desire. This will help keep them active and occupied. They have reached retirement, so the retirement income is a plus to the household finances and could go a lot further in caring for them than if they were by themselves. Whatever other assets they have will probably be given to the family who takes them in, like the family home, cars, and such. Your children can help chauffeur them around to whatever events they need to attend. Of course there may come times of frustration and perhaps emotional upheaval, but as we know that exists with all love relationships. The key here is that we are actively involved with those relationships—this is true love. Perhaps most of the time parents reach quite older ages before they desire assistance. I just gave this scenario to get you thinking of how positively it could work out even though the age range may be out of the norm.

LOVE FOR YOUR SIBLINGS

Whether you are married and or have children, loving your brothers and sisters almost always comes after loving your parents. I say usually because there are special circumstances when children are not raised by either of their parents yet reared with their sibling(s), such as in a foster care home. In these types of cases the category of parental love may be missing altogether, allowing their sibling love to move up in the next available priority. Also

considering similar circumstances children who have been raised by someone other than their natural parents may feel parental love for those people. This is normal and healthy because a parent is not just someone who is so because they filled the biological equation. They are a parent because they have filled the responsible role of protecting, loving, providing for, and instructing that child in the ways of life.

Certainly living in the home and learning how to love, showing actions of taking care of our siblings, lends a tremendous wealth of training and experience in developing formative skills of relationship building. Especially when it comes to skills used in our married relationships, because as with our siblings we are forced to love each other even when things don't go our way or when we don't agree. In a loving home where unconditional and sacrificial love are practiced, giving one another aid becomes the focus and not the selfish desires of the spoiled. Such emphasis is bound to help rear children into adulthood who are willing to focus on the one who is loved and not just on themselves, so that there can be a flexibility to allow the two people within the union to become one. Needless to say we are aiding our children a great deal when we force them to get along, love, and protect one another even when at times they don't feel like it, for they will have to in their marriages to come.

Many times in a family there are two or three siblings who are especially close for whatever reason. This is fine and healthy, for it helps us identify a deeper sense of love and connection with others that we are all capable of. However, when we marry, the separation from the old family must be allowed as well as be made clear so that there is no confusion as to the order of importance of relationships for the one who has married. Close siblings should not feel like they are losing a brother or a sister when either of them marries but gaining so much more of what GOD has in store for

them. Getting married, if that is GOD'S will for a person's life, is a natural progression of life and those who partake in it should be allowed the blessings of those who are not starting a family yet to move forward as GOD has purposed for them.

As time goes on the families of the siblings will hopefully grow as extensions of the love of those siblings. They can now not only enjoy one another but one another's spouses, their children, and even the family and friends of the spouses. As time continues and circumstances change there will be increasing opportunities to display love one to another, which is the design of GOD.

THE LOVE OF CLOSE FRIENDS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

The next category for our consideration is the one designated for our close friends and other family members, such as our aunts and uncles, grandparents, etc. As Christians, our church family also belongs in this love category.

Oftentimes we build deep, loving, and close relationships with friends we have grown up with or members of our family that we have known from childhood. The love is so strong and the bond so intense that the relationship resembles that of a brother or a sister. This, too, is acceptable as long as we are cognizant of the fact that these people are not our siblings and therefore do not have certain familial rights in our family that other members of our family do. Say, for instance, as a child I had a friend whom I loved like a brother, yet my mother would not allow him to come home and live with me. As we grew into adulthood we remained close, yet when my father dies, my friend will not be entitled to a portion of the family inheritance.

“This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” John 15:12

I would also like to mention in this segment how important it is to love our spiritual brothers and sisters as Jesus commanded. The beauty of being born again into the family of GOD is that we now have an eternal family whose bond with us is closer than blood, for it is the bond of the Holy Spirit. Oftentimes I have met Christians who were, previous to that point, total strangers to me, yet after discovering their faith in Christ and fellowshiping with them for a short time, I felt as though I had known them for years. This is the type of love that should be displayed throughout Christendom worldwide, between all Christians who believe that Jesus is the Son of GOD and their Savior. There are still too many of us divided because of our prejudices against certain races of people or different beliefs. GOD is love and HE has placed HIS love in us for a reason—to take care of one another in a world that hates Christians and in many lands persecutes them even to the point of death. If we do not love one another as Christ commanded us, how are we going to survive, let alone effectively propagate this world with the gospel of HIS love?

Again true love from GOD is always good and greatly to be enjoyed by all who embrace it, for it brings freedom from the hate, unforgiveness, and prejudice that hold many captive. Any opportunity we have to love someone is a good one and will benefit all who are involved. It is not always easy because everyone is not a proponent of the love of GOD but its counterfeit, lust, which only seeks to destroy its captives. Let us be wise and embrace GOD and HIS love so that we can be free once again to love everyone in this world as GOD intended for us to.

OUR LOVE FOR OUR ASSOCIATES, COWORKERS, ETC.

Many times we find ourselves building relationships with team members, associates, and co-workers in the workplace because we spend so much time together. This, of course, is good and healthy for our lives, and in many cases these relationships turn

into deeper bonds such as close friends or even married unions. As long as we can keep these relationships free from lust, they can fill us with fun and camaraderie, which will aid us in completing our desired corporate mission and career success.

LOVE FOR THE WORLD

And He said unto him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" And Jesus answering said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, "Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor to him that fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He that showed mercy on him." Then said Jesus unto him, "Go, and do thou likewise." Luke 10:28-37

Through these scriptures, Jesus teaches that we are not only in relationship with everyone else in the world; we also ought to love them as we love ourselves. What a beautiful purpose GOD has

in giving HIS love to us, so that we may give that same love to everyone else in the world. Undoubtedly this would heal the pains of our nations as well as the strife between them, if only we could believe and practice love as GOD has given it to us.

On a personal scale, as the lawyer who was questioning Jesus, we, too, are commanded to show compassion and be in relationship with not only those we know but also those we do not. Like the fellow who fell among thieves there are countless individuals who are hurting from lack of food and shelter, from failed relationships, and many other circumstances that have transpired in their lives. We are to act like the Samaritan did when he stopped his world to become involved with someone else's. We live in a world that is hurting; it takes acts of compassion and love to help stop the hurting and pain, and begin the process of healing. It will be those who believe they can make a difference who will make the difference in someone's life. If it is just one person's life that is healed as a result of someone else showing compassion, it is worth the effort.

“When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: And before Him shall be gathered all the nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, “Come, ye blessed of My FATHER, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison and ye came unto Me.” Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, “Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?

When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?" And the King shall answer and say unto them, "Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Then shall He say unto them on His left hand, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not." Then shall they also answer Him, saying, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?" Then shall He answer them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." And these shall go away into everlasting punishment but the righteous into life eternal." Matthew 25:31-46

In these scriptures, Jesus encourages us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to those who are thirsty, and visit the sick and imprisoned. Again this shows us we are accountable to GOD for showing acts of kindness, love, and compassion to those we might not even know. We, GOD'S people, are in relationship with the world around us and we ought to be agents of love so that we can make this world a better place. Whatever GOD has gifted us to do, let us do it well and in love so that all who are around us in the world may benefit, even those who may be less fortunate than ourselves.

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy." But I say unto you,

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your FATHER which is in heaven: for HE maketh HIS sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your FATHER which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:43-48

The last category of love relationships that we will consider is that of our enemies. Yes, that’s right, we are supposed to love even our enemies.

Many times throughout the course of life, for whatever reason, we develop rotten relationships with people who will eventually turn on us and call us or we call them our enemies. This, of course, cannot be avoided, because people have problems within themselves and instead of looking within to find out what is wrong with them, they tend to cast the problem out of themselves onto someone else and blame them for what is wrong in their lives. This reaction displays itself in any number of negative emotions such as malice, prejudice, and hatred, just to name a few. In other words we may have developed an enemy relationship and had very little to do with it as well as having done nothing to provoke it.

Nevertheless Christ commands us to love even our enemies, to do good to them even when they intend to harm us. Certainly this is hard to do for the average person, but for the Christian who is empowered by GOD’S love even this task can be accomplished. Because it is a task that can be accomplished in the spirit, which is a deeper and more powerful level of a human being than

their emotions or intellect. Therefore, GOD is able to require this type of love from us even though we may feel incapable of it. Because we are commanded to love our enemies it does not mean that we are to allow them to continue to hurt us to the point of our destruction. People oftentimes hurt us because they themselves have been and are still hurting. Therefore, a level of compassion should be displayed from us to our enemies with the understanding that the problem lies within their unresolved hurt and not in us, if that is the case. This compassion will still allow you to be hurt by that individual from time to time, but the hurt that is inflicted upon you should not be enough to destroy you. If it comes to that point, in most cases you should back away from that person or group of people and love them from a distance. I believe sacrificial love means just that, being able to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of others. Christians, I believe, can accomplish this with the help of GOD in Christ. The love and compassion shown to our enemies will help heal the hurt that made them our enemies whether we caused them to be our enemies or not. Certainly if we have had something to do with causing someone else to become our enemy, we should by all means ask for forgiveness in the role we played in hurting the other person and do our best to resolve the conflict as well as restore the relationship.

CHAPTER 6 EXERCISE

1. Properly categorize your love relationships.
2. Place sub-categories in the love category entitled "Spouse" if you are single. Sub-categories such as Friend, Platonic Relationship, Boyfriend, etc.
3. Begin to deal with each category on its level of priority.

4. Involve those you love in the process if there are changes that you may anticipate, or someone you love notices some changes in how you are displaying your love toward them.

5. Reassess from time to time your entire landscape of love relationships to make sure everything is okay in your relationships and that you are well adjusted within yourself and your relationship with GOD in Christ.

Other Characteristics of Love:

FORGIVENESS

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly FATHER will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your FATHER forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:12-15

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Hebrews 8:12

“For GOD so loved the world, that HE gave HIS only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

It is clear through the scriptures that GOD has orchestrated a plan to not only forgive us of our sins but cause us to afford all

those we know and love the same benefit. The scriptures indicate that we are to forgive everyone their trespasses against us because GOD has completely forgiven us of ours and will remember them no more. GOD loves us so much that HE allowed HIS only Son to die in the place of our sins' penalty so that we could have our love relationship restored with HIM and live with GOD forever.

It is with this backdrop in mind that we can understand how forgiveness is the salve of love that allows the wounds from painful relationships to heal so that one can become whole again. Oftentimes people find themselves developing coping mechanisms within their behavior to help them deal with evil and/or adverse relationships from people who are supposed to be their loved ones. These coping mechanisms continue to shape people's conduct long after the damaging relationship is over, leaving a person behaving in ways that aren't characteristic of their original self, not whole and incomplete. Take the person who was abused as a child and becomes obese to avoid being attractive so that the abuse won't happen again. Or the person who was beaten profusely as a teenager and now in adulthood takes his or her rage out on his or her own children. How can these and others end the cycle and the coping mechanisms to start on the road of recovery? Through forgiveness. Forgiveness is GOD'S answer for our coping mechanisms that have aided us in surviving relationships that should have killed us, yet they have allowed us to be robbed of a part of ourselves that makes us whole. Forgiveness allows us to put into proper perspective the sins that others have committed toward us. Knowing that all sin causes death, whether it is from a parent to a child, a friend to another, or from an uncle to a niece, all sinful actions cause death in both parties involved. For whatever reason, people sin against others as a result of people sinning against them. Hence there is this vicious cycle of sin, hurt, and pain that exists in the world. So GOD says I will take all the

sin, pain, and the suffering from sin upon MYSELF in the person of MY Son, who died upon the cross. Now if anyone wants to avenge themselves of someone else's sins they can do so by giving them to Jesus on the cross. They can remove the sins from themselves and others by placing them on the cross where Jesus bled and died. Well, if we have the ability to remove sins that a person has done to us by placing them on Jesus' cross, then what are we left to do with that person? We are to forgive them as Jesus forgave us of all of our sins.

Now we are able to release ourselves from those old coping mechanisms to become free in our behavior that is indicative of who we really are. No longer scared, afraid, or angry, holding malice in our hearts from something that happened years ago, yet controlling our present and future. Through forgiveness of ourselves and from GOD we are now able to receive love from HIM to help heal us from our past. Through forgiving others we can stop the cycle from repeating itself. We can even reverse it by going back to those who once harmed us and offer them the way of healing through forgiveness and love from GOD in Jesus the Christ.

Then came Peter to Him, and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Jesus saith unto him, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

Certainly forgiveness will play a vital role in all of the love relationships we will experience, for there is no one perfect person whom we will love except for GOD HIMSELF. Therefore, we must always be willing to forgive those whom we are in relationship with. This does not mean that we do not hold our loved ones accountable or punishable for the wrongdoing they commit. But it does mean that after their negative behavior has been reprimanded, love and

forgiveness are waiting to help heal the sinful inclinations that caused that person to fall into temptation and hurt others. Jesus says to forgive those we are in relationship with 490 times in one day. He means for us to forgive others an innumerable amount of times. Let us do so, allowing our love unions to continue unabated even though we are imperfect and prone to cause impending ills in our relationships.

CHARITY

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels; and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all the faith, so I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. I Corinthians 13

The word charity in Greek is the same word for love (agape), which is the subject of our study. It is quite interesting to me that the scholars who interpreted the Bible into the language of the king decided to use this word charity to describe the Greek word for love. To those using the English language, the word charity means or alludes to performing acts of kindness and/or of love. In other words this word agape (love) is an action word that takes care of, does acts of charity for all those who are involved with it.

IS LONGSUFFERING AND KIND, ISN'T EASILY PROVOKED, DOESN'T THINK EVIL, BEARS ALL THINGS

The scriptures say that charity (love) suffers long and is kind, is not easily provoked, bears all things. Contrary to popular belief, love does involve pain and suffering. In our society and for that matter the world, the fascination with ecstasy and fantasy has created an unrealistic view of love and love in relationships. It should be logically deduced that if we live in an imperfect world with imperfect people with imperfect situations, our relationships will be filled with imperfections. These imperfections will cause pain and suffering in our relationships, but the right kind of love, GOD'S love, has all of the key ingredients to keep the love flowing even though imperfections exist in our relationships.

Our scripture text implies the prolonged pain we get in bearing all that is suffered, this love is not easily provoked and even when it is, it responds in kindness. Many people cringe at the thought of suffering any kind of pain in a love relationship for fear of becoming vulnerable, being used or taken advantage of. Yet in the scriptures we see love enjoined with pain and suffering. Once again we cannot give what we have not received, but once we realize how much GOD through Christ suffered for us and we believe as well as receive this into our lives, we will then be able to endure a fraction of that pain for those we say we love. Can we?

Of course we can. Just think about your children again (if you have them). You suffer(ed) sleepless nights and seemingly endless diapers with love and joy. Why? Because you love them. As they get older you endure their mistakes and help them make their growth adjustments in an encouraging way. Why? Because you love them. If you can do that with your child, why not your spouse? If with your pet, why not your mother-in-law or coworker? Certainly we are capable of receiving GOD'S love into our lives of loving others with a longsuffering and kind love. We just have to renew our minds with the mind of Christ so that we love the way He loves.

We must also understand that our charity, giving love, does not think or dwell upon evil or doing evil to those we are in relationship with. As our minds are renewed after Jesus' we find ourselves thinking of giving or wanting to aid even our enemies as they try to destroy us, as Christ did when His adversaries killed Him. He was not easily provoked to wrath and did not muse thoughts of murder even though He Himself was being murdered. On the contrary, He took thoughts of charity and converted them into actions of love and mercy. We, too, must do the same so that we may fulfill the scriptures, bearing all the imperfections of our loved ones, yet not us but GOD in Christ who bore them on the cross. In a world where love is so fragile that the slightest of imperfections cause relationships to shatter, isn't it refreshing to know that GOD enables us to love each other with the true love that will have the strength to bear each other's faults?

**CHARITY DOESN'T ENVY, DOES NOT VAUNT ITSELF. IS NOT PUFFED UP,
DOESN'T BEHAVE UNSEEMLY, IS NOT SELFISH**

True love is not self-serving or self-centered; it doesn't always concern itself with matters of self but those of others. Again selfishness is in direct opposition to the very purpose of love, which is to care

for others as or in the like manner that one would care for themselves. Self then takes a secondary position after self is taken care of, compared to the larger number of those who need to be taken care of. We are encouraged to love the whole world as ourselves. Obviously it is going to take more of our resources to take care of others than it takes to care for our one person. This is why GOD gives us resources in abundance, not so that we can heap them upon ourselves, but show acts of kindness and love, charity, upon those who surround us.

Therefore, we do not have the time or the energy to act in unseemly ways, such as having temper tantrums and spoiled fits every time life does not go our way. Nor do we have the luxury of being so proud and puffed up, vaunting or thinking so highly of ourselves that we become uninvolved with aiding people from the ills of this life. Again love is to care for one another, humbling one's self to help and enjoin in the facilitating of another's needs. Love doesn't ask the question "How could you have been so stupid or careless or weak and helpless?" But love asks "How can I make up the difference, the lack in your being that displays such hurt and pain?" Who wouldn't in the time of need rather have someone to aid them as opposed to assassinate them or be uninvolved? Love will not be concerned about personal reputation or getting dirty while pulling someone else out of the mud. Because true love cares for others, sometimes even more than one would care for themselves.

CHARITY DOES NOT REJOICE IN INIQUITY BUT REJOICES IN THE TRUTH

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship The FATHER in spirit and truth; for The FATHER seeketh such to worship HIM. GOD Is A SPIRIT: and they that worship HIM must worship HIM in spirit and in truth." John 4:23-24

The Bible says that love thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in truth. It also says that the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers of GOD shall worship The FATHER in Spirit and truth, for The FATHER seeketh such to worship HIM. GOD Is A SPIRIT and they that worship HIM must worship HIM in Spirit and in truth. GOD our FATHER is The GOD of truth. The mention of HIS Supreme DEITY implies truth, honesty, and equity. Therefore, the love HE expresses must be truth. GOD is all-knowing; therefore, there is nothing that GOD does not know. Whatever knowledge HE reveals is revealed with this backdrop and intent, that HE knows everything about what is being revealed. This makes everything that is being revealed ultimately the truth. Hence the love HE reveals to us is ultimately the truth, pure, and free from evil.

However, the love that comes from the world is impure and tainted with sin and therefore cannot be ultimately true and pure. In fact true love cannot exist mixed with lies and iniquity. This is why so many so-called love relationships are failing, because dishonesty and iniquity exist in the relationship. Some people cannot tell the truth and even if they could, the sin and iniquity in the relationship will eventually kill the relationship in most cases. In other words if a person is relying on some sort of iniquity to sustain the relationship, let's say lust for sex or money, that false kind of love will eventually die because it is not founded upon the truth, but a lie and iniquity. It will die because it is not really love but is its counterfeit, which is lust, which continuously needs to be replenished, unlike true love, which is self-perpetuating.

Because love is pure coming from GOD, a love that cannot coexist with dishonesty and iniquity, GOD'S love must be filled completely and ultimately be the truth. You must be able to count on what HE has revealed to you to benefit you with a prevailing

security that what HE said will uphold you always and forever, without wavering. You must also know that GOD'S love is ultimately pure and full of equity, not sin and blemishes, a love that will hold strong throughout eternity.

After we have received this ultimately true and pure kind of love from GOD we are then able to love and expect to be loved in the same manner. No longer is it acceptable to receive lies as love or to participate in iniquity as love because now we are experiencing GOD'S love and we will accept nothing less. This does not mean that we discard people in our lives that lie to us or try to get us to do evil. It simply means that we will no longer accept these attempts as manifestations of love; therefore, we must expose them with the truth of GOD'S Word and HIS Spirit.

In the love relationships that we find ourselves in we, too, must love others in such a way that does not tempt or seduce them into sin. On the contrary, we must be examples of truth whose love will command others to be in relationship with us based upon the higher standards of equity, respect, and love.

Exercise - Think of the evil thoughts and deeds that you have accepted into your life as love, perhaps lies you told or evil acts that you previously engaged in.

- Now begin to accept into your being (mind, emotions, will, and body) that these were not manifestations of love but lust that were killing the love, your love, you had for others.
- Now ask Jesus to forgive you.
- Also say to yourself that you no longer want to love that way again. Commit to your belief system that you no longer believe that lies and engaging in acts of iniquity are manifestations of love.

- Command your body, mind, emotions, and your will to no longer accept these deceptive ways as love but to walk in the truth of GOD'S Word.
- Lastly, begin to share this lie and evil-free love with those you love. The goal here is not to be perfect but to have the intentions of loving the way GOD loves, in truth and in equity.

GOD'S LOVE CONTINUALLY HOPES, CONTINUALLY BELIEVES

Then said they unto Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of GOD?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of GOD, that ye believe on Him whom HE hath sent." John 6:28-29

The Bible says that love believes all things and hopes in all things. The followers of Christ also asked Him what they should do to work the works of GOD. His reply was to believe in Him, that this was the work of GOD. As we can see through the scriptures GOD is The GOD of faith, mixing belief and hope operating thereby. When GOD says something HE fully expects what HE said to come to pass no matter what obstacles and spiritual warfare may arise to stop it. GOD always believes and GOD always hopes until HE receives whatever it is that HE has said.

With this in mind we can see GOD'S love for us, believing the best for us (eternal life) and always hoping that we will receive it. This is the will of GOD that we will believe upon Jesus Christ. It never dies out or changes no matter if mankind rejects the plea of our FATHER which is in heaven. HE continues to believe that mankind will receive HIS love, offering them eternal life through HIS Son Jesus Christ.

Once we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we then have this eternal aspect of love abiding within us. We can then

in turn love others the same way. What does this mean? It means that you can believe the best (eternal life) for all those you love and hope for, until it comes to pass. Take for instance the son who is addicted to drugs, that adulterous wife, or lying husband. Those who are praying for their restoration continually believe that GOD is going to step into the situation and make it better. No matter what adverse signals those we are praying for give, our love will continue to believe and hope the best for them. This does not mean that we will be blind to their evil ways and gullible to their devices. On the contrary, your continued belief and hope will cause them to be more accountable. It will say, "I will always believe that you are better and I will always support your efforts to that end." Then you adjust your behavior with that person based on the changes that GOD has wrought in their life, always encouragingly believing and hoping for the best.

Exercise - Read these scriptures, Mark 11:22-26

- Use the formula of faith - Pray
- Believe, don't doubt
- Receive whatever it is you are praying for, right now!!!
- Hope, always knowing that what you said will come to pass.
- Say aloud to the situation whatever it is you desire.
- Forgive if you have animosity against any.
- Take whatever action GOD tells you to concerning the situation.
- Now think of the people you love and the evil ways that they have.
- Now pray that GOD will help them stop that particular behavior in the name of Jesus.
- Now believe that HE will do it no matter what it takes.
- Commit to always hoping, knowing that Jesus will make the changes you have prayed for no matter what adverse behavior you may see.

- Now receive it as if it has already happened!
- Forgive that person of any wrongdoing that they have done to you or anyone else for that matter.

ENDURES ALL THINGS, CHARITY NEVER FAILS

The Word of GOD says love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. That love never fails. Because GOD our Heavenly FATHER is an eternal GOD, everything about HIM must be eternal, perpetually renewing, including HIS love. Therefore, we must understand that it will never cease to exist or fall away but remain constant throughout the ages. It is a love that is strong, bearing the infirmities of the weak and enduring our iniquities with patience. In other words our FATHER'S love for us is safe, strong, and secure, so that we can rest in HIM forever. Unlike the world's love, which is unstable at best, never eternal.

GOD, being the eternal GOD that HE is, had to generate the kind of love throughout our universe that would always endure and one that would never fail. This love is not just for mankind, HIS creation, or this earth but all that HE has created throughout eternity. GOD'S love has to take care of all that is, not just planet earth. Therefore, HE must govern those who will not participate in HIS divine plan so that they won't destroy the rest of what HE has created. Hence even the punishments of death and hell become extensions of HIS love, not only for us but for the rest of the universe and whatever else HE has created in the infinite beyond. Can you imagine what would happen if GOD allowed sin to permeate throughout the universe and or in the unseen spiritual world? There would be destruction and utter chaos all the way to HIS throne. We, therefore, have this security that no matter what evils may exist in our world, in the spirit realm or wherever else, GOD'S love is in place governing it. Setting limits on it so that it will not utterly destroy and so that

HIS love may endure, persevere until the evil is over. From this we understand that GOD'S love won't fail us, will not stop for us even when we do evil, because HIS love was created to outlast our evil ways. HIS commitment to us does not extinguish because we make mistakes or even run away from HIM for a time because HE knows that HIS children will return to HIM again. This does not mean that HE will not chastise us, for chastisement is an instrument of love, and without it we would have destroyed ourselves long ago. GOD will do so as an act of love until we come back to HIM, where it is safe and secure for us.

A constant, true love from GOD is the greatest changing agent man can experience. With HIS love HE encourages us to keep on trying, to keep on believing that we can, to keep on hoping that we can do or be whatever it is that HE created us to do or be. No matter how long it takes or how many mistakes we've made, HIS love endures, lives on to tell us to keep on going, "Your race is not over until I say it is over." Once we receive HIS love then it will perpetually live within us and throughout us, not only renewing our lives perpetually but all those we touch. This will make the world a better place, eternally.

By receiving GOD'S love in the form of HIS Son Jesus Christ we can live the abundant life that never fails. With the security in our lives that GOD will always love us, we can endure whatever hardships that may occur, knowing that HE will sustain us through them. This will comfort us until those hardships pass or we've grown out of our childish mistakes into what GOD has called us to be. We are not perfect but forgiven, pardoned until we become complete. Therefore, we never have a reason to be discouraged to the point of giving up, but HIS love causes us to keep on trying.

Once we have received this kind of enduring and never-failing love from GOD into our very own being, we are then commanded to

love others in the same fashion. As our loved ones make choices that we might disagree with or even cause us pain, our response will not be to discard them but to love them through their apparent indiscretions, to the point where they make better decisions. Even when we have to chastise our children or correct a family member or friend, it should not be done with threats of ending the (our) relationship. For our loved ones must always know that the love we have for them will always endure and never fail or stop, although they may do things to displease us. This will help keep the bond in the relationship until there is a meeting of the minds concerning whatever disagreement that may exist in the relationship.

This love will also cause us to share it with all those we know and love. Who would not need to know GOD'S eternal love for themselves so that they, too, could be changed for an eternity? Because we have received a love that will endure through all and never fail, we can begin to love people around us with the same kind of love. We can continue to love people even though they have problems or inconvenience us at times. Our love for them will endure because it will not depend upon us for strength but depend upon GOD. We won't have to strain to give it, but it will flow like a river of living water from us, refreshing all those who drink from it.

Exercise - Think of GOD'S love for you. Think about how it will always be there for you, for an eternity. Meditate on this. That HE will always be there for you even when you make your greatest mistakes, commit your greatest sins. HIS love will be right there for you, to pick you up again, forever. Continue to meditate on this, letting GOD wash and cleanse your heart from a lack of HIS pure love. Let HIM and HIS love fill you up at this time until your cup begins to run over and you begin to cry tears of great joy. That GOD truly does love me abundantly, so much, too much, forever!!!

- After you are done rejoicing, begin to think about those people in your life who need GOD'S love. Think of how you can be an instrument of GOD'S love in their lives. How the love you will share with them will be one that endures hardship and one that will not fail.
- Lastly, pray and ask for GOD'S direction in your life in carrying HIS love to the world; then follow the directives HE gives you.

The Love of Your Eternal Life: GOD in Christ

**He that loves not knows not GOD; for GOD is love. |
John 4:8**

For one to truly love, that person must know GOD, for as the Bible says, "GOD is love." Many in the world are seeking love without or outside of a relationship with GOD and this, of course, is futile. Once people realize that true love only comes from GOD they should be happy to embrace and seek HIM, for it will be in HIM that we will find the true meaning of life, which is to love HIM and our neighbors as ourselves.

**Note: Those who are seeking love are really seeking
GOD, for GOD is love.**

Jesus came to reveal this truth to us that we may accept it and live it throughout eternity. GOD did not create us to die but live in right relationship with HIM forever. Certainly if you had the chance to begin your life anew and live for an eternity in bliss with GOD and HIS children, wouldn't you? I would hope so, for this is the kind of love that our FATHER GOD has for us, so

much so that HE desires to spend eternity loving and taking care of us.

And Jesus answered him, "The first of all commandments is, Hear O Israel; The Lord our GOD is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all of thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29-31

When we consider our responsibility in loving GOD we must take into account what Jesus said, that we should love HIM with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. There is no part of our being that is exempt from loving HIM and we must love HIM with 100% of everything that we are. In other words everything about our lives must be an expression of our love for HIM. How we work, how we play, and how we relate to those around us.

OUR HEART

The Greek word used here for heart is *kardia*, which means the thoughts or the feelings of the mind. In other words what Jesus was saying was that we must love GOD with all of the feelings that reside in our emotional capacity. That HE must be the primary focus of our emotional being. Our love, happiness, joy, passion, as well as our anger, jealousy, and frustrations all must revolve around and be regulated by HIM. All of our emotions, both bad and good, must reach out and intertwine with HIS, experiencing HIM so that our emotions can become like HIS.

OUR SOUL

This word in the Greek language is *psuche*. It describes the part of our being that thinks, expresses emotions, and exercises volition. Unlike our eternal spirit, our soul is that tangible part of us that regulates the intangible expressions of our being. We are made up of body, soul, and spirit. Our body is the physical or tangible expression of our being, our soul is our intangible expression, and our spirit is the spiritual expression of our being. What GOD is saying is that we must love HIM with all of our decision-making, our thoughts, and our emotions.

Since we will deal with the heart and mind of mankind separately I will just discuss the volition or the will of man in this segment. Within the soul of man lies his or her ability to make choices, whether they are for GOD or not. What the scriptures that we are considering are instructing us to do is to make decisions that are in concordance with GOD, thus being an expression of love for HIM. We are faced with many decisions throughout the course of one day, and one wrong choice can ruin many right choices, so it is imperative that we ascribe to the high standard of loving GOD with all of our decision-making capacity.

OUR MIND

Dianoia is the Greek word used in this passage of scripture for the mind. It means deep thought and/or the mental capacity of our being that does our thinking, has understanding and an imagination. What Jesus was saying here was that all of our thoughts and thought processes must be regulated by GOD and be an expression of love for HIM. The accomplishment of this goal begins with The Word of GOD, whether our thoughts are biblical and/or come from HIS Holy Spirit. We all must learn (mentally grasp) HIS ways so that we may not only understand HIS love for us but understand how we may love others.

OUR STRENGTH

Know ye not that ye are the temple of GOD, and that the Spirit of GOD dwelleth in you? I Corinthians 3:16

The Greek word used for strength in Mark chapter 12 is *ischus*, which means force, might, power, or strength. We know that this expression of our being is derived from the physical portion of our being, which is our body. Therefore, Jesus' instruction to us was that we must love GOD with all of our physical energies, that they all must be an expression and reflection of our love for HIM. Even how we take care of ourselves is an expression of how we love GOD, for the scripture says that we are the temple of GOD. Certainly we should not defile the very place where we house GOD, which is in our bodies. Hence the physical expression of our being plays a very important role in our loving GOD as well.

OUR SPIRIT

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship The FATHER in spirit and in truth: for The FATHER seeketh such to worship HIM. GOD is a Spirit: and they that worship HIM must worship HIM in spirit and in truth." John 4:23-24

Jesus saith unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto The FATHER, but by me." John 14:6

Jesus also commands us to worship GOD, which is an expression of our love for HIM through our regenerated spirits. Our spirit is that portion of our being that is eternal and has the capacity to communicate with GOD and the spirit world. How we choose to worship or use our spiritual capacity determines from GOD'S

perspective whether it has been regenerated or not. If a person chooses to worship GOD through Jesus, then that person's spirit is considered to be regenerated and his or her worship is accepted, for Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. But if a person decides not to choose Jesus as his or her pathway of worship of GOD, then that person's spirit is considered from GOD'S viewpoint as not being regenerated. Although an unregenerate person has the capacity to function in the spirit world through, let's say, pagan worship, the occult, or sorcery, that person's worship is not accepted by GOD because it didn't come through the way that HE designated, which was through HIS Son Jesus, the Christ. Our ability to love GOD with our spirit through worship, therefore, relies on one simple decision and that decision is whether or not we will accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins for our lives so that we may be pardoned from our sins and acceptable to GOD. Once we have accepted GOD's way of worship (our spirit loving HIM), then we are free to communicate with HIM and HE with us so that we may know what HIS perfect will is for our lives. The only activity left for us to do in response to HIM is to listen and obey HIM. In this we will find true life and love, living in harmony with GOD.

LOVING GOD

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My FATHER, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat:

I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying Lord when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? Or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? Or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Mathew 25:31-46

In remaining true to the purpose of love, which is to take care of one another, one might ask concerning their love for GOD, "How do I take care of GOD?" The answer is in the scriptures just cited. Jesus was saying that we could actually love GOD in Christ by taking care of those who are less fortunate in the world. By ministering to those in need whether they be in a prison or a hospital, or without a home, food, clothing, or something to drink, we are ministering or taking care of GOD in Christ. This means that the

very individuals in the world who are looked upon with scorn are the people GOD is calling for us to love HIM through. Therefore, we should not see those who are in need as people who are a burden to our society but a pathway of loving GOD. Hence we should be happy to have the opportunity to aid someone in these areas and more. As we begin to give more love to GOD (taking care of those less fortunate) we will find ourselves receiving more love from those we minister unto as well as GOD HIMSELF, and what a joyous experience that will be.

As we love and take care of those less fortunate and experience the many blessings of this kind of ministry, we will be enabled to more effectively love and take care of our family, friends, associates, and others we know. As a result all of our relationships will become an expression of our love for GOD.

EXERCISE CHAPTER 8

1. Accept the truth that your quest for finding true love is really a quest for finding GOD, for GOD is love.
2. Make sure your spirit is regenerated.
3. Begin to ascribe to the high standard of loving GOD with your total being, with your body (strength), soul (heart, mind, and volition), and spirit.
4. Ponder ways that you can help those who are less fortunate, especially the homeless, imprisoned, the sick, and those without clothing, food, or water.

The Love of Your Temporal Life: Your Spouse

And The LORD GOD said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him." And out of the ground The LORD GOD formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And The LORD GOD caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and HE took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which The LORD GOD had taken from man, made HE a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:18-25

In the beginning of mankind, prior to their fall to sin, GOD'S desire for their relationship was that it would be filled with love and overflowing fulfillment in every way possible. That HE would be able to share in it, the love being pure and unadulterated, coming from HIM. This, too, is HIS desire for our married relationships as well. That they would be overflowing with love and total fulfillment in every way possible. If we are careful to do things HIS way in seeking a mate, we can experience what HIS will is for our union with our spouse and that is for it to be everything we dreamed it would be and more.

As we have seen in the scriptures, GOD noticed that there was a void in Adam's life because in HIS entire kingdom there was not found a help meet for Adam. In discovering the true and ultimate blessing in seeking and finding our spouse, it behooves us (both men and women) to peer into Adam's dilemma to see how GOD solved it, for in its solution we will find our purpose and fulfillment in having a spouse.

Obviously something was wrong with Adam's situation for GOD to say that it was not good for Adam to be alone. In other words something was missing in Adam's life that GOD'S solution, HIS new creation, which was woman, would bring into his life and fulfill. What GOD said Adam was missing was a help meet, which is translated from the Hebrew word *ezer*, meaning aid. What GOD was saying was that Adam was missing an aid in his life to help him fulfill all that GOD had desired for him to accomplish. She was to be the imperfect piece that would fit perfectly into Adam's imperfect world and would make both of their lives perfect as it pertains to their fulfilling the will of GOD for their lives. In this we can see the perfect plan for marriage.

First of all we must assume that GOD gave both Adam and Eve true unconditional and sacrificial love for each other. Secondly

we must assume that GOD created Adam for Eve's help or aid just as much as HE did Eve for Adam's. Hence GOD'S perfect plan for their marriage would be totally fulfilling, each party to the union sharing equally and contributing to the relationship, the only clear difference being in the roles they would play. Adam was to find purpose in being the visionary who would hear from GOD on what to do and how to do it. Eve was to find her purpose in helping Adam do what GOD had called him, hence them, to do. Perhaps there would be some women who would at this juncture say that this would put Adam in a greater or higher position. To this I would disagree and simply say that women have a different role to play within the married union. It is irrelevant as to who has the preeminence in the relationship as it would be in other relationships, say on a basketball team or in a dance troupe. For everything to work cohesively and smoothly each person has to play within their role and not in someone else's. Because of how GOD created men and women as well as the marriage institution, it is best for mankind to follow the parameters that have been set within the marriage union, and those are for men to be the leaders and the women to be the followers of the leader.

I have stated this should exist within the marriage union because without the union women and men have their own preeminence and can please GOD as they choose without having to answer to anyone. The woman can pursue the career of her dreams as she is led. When she marries it does not mean that she can no longer pursue her dreams, but she should make sure her career and dreams align with the man she is considering to be her husband. This is so that her imperfect life and lifestyle will fit perfectly into his imperfect world, and their world can become complete as it pertains to fulfilling the perfect will of GOD for their lives.

For this to happen and be fulfilling to either party, the man must find and be in love with a woman who is willing to follow and

support the vision that he has received for his life. Also, the woman must find a man whom she will love and find fulfillment in following and supporting the vision he has for his life. This, combined with true unconditional and sacrificial love, will make for a truly fulfilling relationship.

As a man decides to consider seeking a marriage partner he should first be positioned as Adam was, with a purpose in his life to pursue, a vision as to the direction in which his life is going. Secondly that vision should be able to provide for him as well as the bride he will be seeking. This is critical to the overall well-being of the woman being aided in the relationship as Eve was aided by Adam in the first relationship, for they had want of nothing. He then must carefully consider women who are willing to aid him in his vision, cause, and direction in life. In the process of his search he must be acutely aware of the leading of GOD in his life while discovering the gift of unconditional and sacrificial love that HE has given him for that special woman who will be called his wife.

Also, prior to giving up her own preeminence in her own life, a woman will consider a marriage partner whom she will help support physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for the rest of her life. It is important then for her to be prepared in all of these areas. She should be educated in the affairs of life and home as well as competent emotionally, spiritually, and if need be in the area of career as well. She must then be careful to seek out a man whose vision she can follow and support as well as one whose vision can, with her help, provide for them and their family. Lastly she, too, must be open to the hearing of The Voice of GOD in her discovery of the gift HE has given her in having unconditional and sacrificial love for her man.

It will be from these two imperfect human beings that GOD through love will fitly join together perfectly to fulfill HIS purpose in both of

their lives becoming one. No more will they be considered two separate beings in the spirit world, for GOD has joined them together and what GOD has joined together no man can put asunder. Now they will share wedding rings and the same last name, telling the world of their oneness. Their union is to be a reflection of GOD'S love for the world and a source of comfort for all those around it. It is to be a blessing to those within and those without, a wellspring of life and an example to all who behold it. Their perfect union may be filled with imperfections, yet the love they share will be strong enough to soothe and overcome the greatest of adversities, for their relationship has been founded upon GOD and the principles HE has set for their holy matrimony.

Lastly I would just like to say the love in the lifelong relationship that we may be seeking is like the baking of a cake. All of the proper ingredients must be gathered and blended together. Then after the mixture is placed in the mold it must bake at the right temperature and the proper length of time before it is taken out of the oven and allowed to cool. If the cake is not allowed to be in the oven long enough it will not bake properly and the result will be less than one desires at the very least and certainly not edible. Similarly, love must have all the proper ingredients that GOD has intended for that couple. They must allow these love attributes to mold within their dating process and allowed to bake at the right temperature of life's circumstances over a long enough time for the couple to realize the true gift of unconditional and sacrificial love that GOD has given them for each other. All the while resisting the temptation to circumvent the baking process and prematurely remove the union from the courtship oven by entering into premarital sex and/or other lusts producing the undesirable result of lust instead of love.

It is my prayer that your love relationship with your spouse would reflect the highest degree of love that was intended for the married

union. Whether you are just beginning your quest for your lifelong love or you have been married for 35 years, I believe HIS will of unconditional and sacrificial love can be experienced in your life. I also believe that by our sharing in this book together you have allowed The Holy Spirit of GOD to enlighten your pathway in finding and improving your lifelong relationship in this temporal life. Thank you for this experience that we have had together. May GOD richly bless you in the precious name of Jesus the Christ, HIS Son. Amen.

CHAPTER 9 EXERCISE

1. After you have become successful at living free from lust (be it for sex, money, power, etc.) for a while, begin to evaluate your emotions as they pertain to your attraction to the opposite sex.
2. Begin to differentiate those emotions between love and lust. Ask yourself "Is what I am feeling for this person I am attracted to the emotion of unconditional and sacrificial love or the emotion of lust?"
3. Shun potential relationships that are indicative of lust, and pursue those where you experience the initial emotion of unconditional and sacrificial love.
4. Seek through prayer, reading HIS Word, and communing with The Holy Spirit GOD'S direction in leading you to and approving the relationship with the person you are attracted to.