

3 Tiny, Power-Packed Words the World Desperately Needs to Hear

It's a gloriously slow, snowy morning, quiet and peaceful. All my sweethearts are warm, cozy and asleep. Me—warm and cozy in my comfy chair, pondering the truth of God's love.

Recently a friend challenged me to consider what love really is. What does it mean to be loved by God? What does it mean to be loved by another? What does love look like in a relationship? What is it supposed to feel like? I think those were all her suggested questions for pondering. There were probably more, but you get the idea.

I am accepting that challenge.

It's something I want to understand. I need to understand. Sometimes I struggle to allow myself to be loved. I think in the back of my head and heart I'm waiting for someone to say, "Nope. You aren't worth it. I thought I loved you, but you just really haven't lived up to my ideals. You are not ideal."

Maybe it's because I'm so intimately acquainted with my failings and my fears and my frustrations. I know myself.

Maybe it's because I don't really understand how I can be loved for me, not just for what I do or say or don't do or don't say.

Maybe it's because I don't understand how much the Father really and truly loves me. I can't comprehend it. I can't grasp it. I can't believe it.

Intellectually, I believe it. But in every other way, I don't seem to get it.

Why in the world does He want to love me, much less actually love me?

What is it about me that is lovable? What is it about me that is beautiful to Him?

My life has been marked by conditional love—if my behavior, my actions, my accomplishments, my looks, my work, my spirituality, the circumstances all work out, if no one else is available—then I'm quite lovable to some. But if the stars aren't aligned, then not so much.

I think I'm finally understanding that I can't make people love me (nor should I), and wondrously, I can't make God not love me.

Sigh. There is so much comfort in that. I wish I knew how to live as though I know it.

Love: such a huge concept, and yet so simple.

It all comes together in three little words.

God is love.

Three profound little words. Three syllables. Three short little words in a short little sentence that encompass all the meaning the world could ever truly need.

I need love because I need God.

I am daring love to change me. Daring love to strengthen me.

I can do this, because I believe that God speaks truth when He says that He is love.

Love isn't some feeling I have to feel to live. It is a Person I have to know to survive.

A capital P person.

I keep thinking that some little person is going to help me understand love. How unfair of me! No one can possibly love me like Jesus does. They can try—and honestly, please do! But I can't expect the love-longing I have inside to be filled by any person.

What person could possibly love me perfectly?

I love my children more than I thought I could possibly love another human being and I fail miserably at it. Daily. How is another person supposed to step into my far less than perfect life and love me perfectly?

What would someone loving me perfectly look like anyway? I mean really.

Sometimes I think I really want the Hallmark movie love—the fairy tale, pursue me, happily ever after kind of love. I thought I had that, but clearly, I did not. I kind of had the Lifetime movie love—drama, adultery, betrayal.

But really and truly, I want the kind of love that God talks about: the lay-down-your-life love. The no-fear love. The unconditional love. The you are such a mess and I love you anyway love.

Already have it.

Have always had it.

Just keep forgetting it.

I believe when I grasp how loved I am by God, I will be better at receiving love from others. When I understand that I'm worth loving because I'm the me God made me to be, then I can love without fear.

And be loved without fear.

I'm working on it. I'm making an effort to allow myself to be

loved and to not try so hard to earn love, to let go of the trying. To let go of the working at being lovable.

I'm probably more lovable when I'm not trying so hard anyway.

There are verses about love that I love. Verses that remind me that love is more than just feeling warm and cuddly. Love is bold and daring. Love is action. Love is strength.

"There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18a).

"Above all, have unfailing love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

"And above all these things, embrace love, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. 3:14).

"My little children, let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth" (1 John 3:18).

"I love you, O Lord, my strength" (Ps. 18:1). {eo}

I have loved. I have trusted when it was really, really difficult to trust. I have leaned in to anxiety and pushed through fear and determined to know how to love well and received love well and see God work

I have succeeded and I have failed. I have opened up my heart and I have closed it as quickly, only to break it back open again. I have softened my heart and hardened it—and allowed it to be massaged back to tenderness. I have lain awake with fear and closed my eyes in prayer for peace. I have determined to understand this thing called love.

It is challenging. It is terrifying.

Love is all the beautiful things and all the heartbreaking things. But isn't that life? Isn't life about living messy?

Love is messy.

When Jesus was beaten, whipped and bloodied for me, it was messy.

When Jesus carried that horrific cross down the Via Dolorosa, it was messy.

When Jesus hung on that scandalous cross dying, it was messy.

A magnificent mess of love.

God loves me in my messiness. God loves me in my chaos. God loves me in my fears, doubts, anxious thoughts and frustrations. God loves me regardless of how well I love Him.

He will always love me.

I pray my heart grasps the deep, deep love of Jesus.

I pray my heart opens wide for that love.

I pray my heart learns from that love how to give and receive love well.

Love is worth it.

My Savior tells me I'm worth it. {eo}

Sue Birdseye is the author of *When Happily Ever After Shatters: Seeing God in the Midst of Divorce and Single Parenting* published by Tyndale/Focus on the Family. Sue is a single mom of five children from 9 to 22 years old.