

3 Ways to Celebrate With or Without a Valentine

Not everyone loves Valentine's Day. Especially if your valentine is gone or has changed. Divorce, separation, death or trauma can overwhelm the wounded heart with grief, pain and loneliness, which only intensify during a holiday where others are celebrating love that for you is now a mere memory.

I've personally known the devastation of abandonment, loss and heartbreak. And yet I also know the victory of progressing one painful step at a time from barely surviving to really living. In my daily interaction with people in pain, it saddens me to see those who seem to want to stay stuck. Those first few steps can be the hardest.

But no matter who was at fault or how unfair things may have been, we still can choose to move forward. Whether this is a good time or a deep valley, we can always celebrate love. Contrary to what many assume, love is not merely a warm fuzzy feeling. True love takes action! The following are three actions that have helped me over the years—not just on Valentine's Day, but also for the ups and downs of everyday life.

1. Love yourself.

Self-care is so much more than manicures, massages and movies. Encompassing all areas of life, biblical self-care is crucial for successfully navigating the onslaught of life's challenges. Try incorporating a self-scan into your daily routine. *Stop.* (Really.) *Ask,* "What do I need right now?" Then *take care* of that need.

Consider your spiritual needs (such as feeding on God's Word and pouring out your heart to the Lord), your physical needs (such as getting enough sleep, nutrients and regular exercise) and your emotional needs (such as processing the feelings in a healthy way and surrounding yourself with good support). Self-care is not a luxury, but a lifeline. And when we take care of ourselves, those around us will also benefit.

For a more complete self-care checklist, see *Formerly A Wife* (divorce recovery), *Goodbye for Now* (grief support and preparation) and *LOVE OUR VETS* (PTSD support).

2. Love someone else.

When Jesus instructed us to love our neighbor as ourselves, it wasn't just a nice suggestion. It was a command! It's ironic how when I'm having a pity party, one of the best things I can do is reach out to someone else who may be hurting. Not only does it take my mind off myself, but it is a blessing to the other person.

Who do you know who could use some encouragement today? Pray for them. Maybe take them a gift basket, or give them a call or email. Or send a card in the mail (remember how to do that?). Love in action will also help put our own suffering in perspective.

3. Love the Lord your God.

This is truly the supreme love to celebrate! God's all-surpassing grace was expressed through the suffering and death of His Son on the cross ... for us who deserve nothing but eternal separation from Him. When was the last time you just sat, alone, *with* Him and pondered the awesome wonder of His eternal love for us, and the privilege of loving Him in return?

We must ask ourselves, "Is He my first love? Over and above everyone and everything else in my life?"

This love we can celebrate anytime, now and throughout eternity. And the other reassurance of God's love is that *He will never leave, and He will never change*. Not even the most amazing earthly Valentine could ever come close.

I hope you truly do have a happy Valentine's Day and are able to celebrate all three of these loves. Every day!

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39). {eoa}

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