

Feeling Unloved and Underserved? This May Be the True Source of Your Struggle

All I wanted to do was sit down on the couch in silence. Instead, I stood at the stove stirring a pot of spaghetti sauce. One of my boys clung to my leg as I tried to keep the noodles from boiling over and marinara from sticking to the pot. As my husband, Kyle, walked through the door after work, our four sons sprinted toward his smile and open arms. I stayed at the stove and stirred the spaghetti with the intensity of a brain surgeon removing a tumor. Clattering about the kitchen as though I were preparing a 12-course meal, I tried to signal to Kyle how hard I was working and how alone I felt in it.

Look at all that needs to be done still, and look at who is doing it!

I wanted to leave work and feel like I was “off,” a reasonable enough desire. But I also wanted to cash in on all the serving I’d done that day by caring for our home and family. And my spaghetti sit-in was more than a confusing way to demand a break—it was a form of exercising control.

Kyle, who rarely asks me to change anything at all, had asked me previously more than once to stop what I was doing when he came home for a quick hug and kiss. He hadn’t even brought it up himself—I had asked him if there was anything I could do to make him feel more loved. His response felt so silly to me. Wasn’t I doing enough? Couldn’t he come home and serve me?

I realize that this sounds so very ugly. Maybe you’ve never withheld a good, simple thing from someone you loved simply because you so desperately wanted to exercise control, or feel like you had accomplished something or be served. Maybe you

haven't ever felt as though your well of love and service has simply run dry and you have nothing left to give. But I have, more than once, which is how I know this marriage moment wasn't about a lack of love for Kyle, but about the shallowness of the well of love I had tried to fill on my own.

The point wasn't that I should do everything Kyle asks me to and ask for nothing myself. The point wasn't even that my desire to be served couldn't be redeemed—graciously receiving love and care can form us more into the image of Christ, just as loving and serving can. The point was that I needed to follow more closely in the footsteps of Jesus, who served to the point of great sacrifice in honor of his Father and for the good of the broken and beloved ones He called brothers and sisters.

My husband isn't wrong to desire affection from me, and I'm not wrong to desire a break from an intense day. And you're not wrong to want to be acknowledged by a boss or friend or spouse, or to feel heard or understood. Where we run into trouble is in seeking to manage the ways others treat us—when we try to control their actions and behaviors in order to ensure our needs will be met. In my story, Kyle had requested my affection. I had clattered pots and pans to hint at the break I felt I deserved, which I felt he should already have known and be giving me. See the difference?

God's love for us does not run dry, nor does His promise to give us everything we need for life and godliness, even when we feel as dry and empty as we can possibly imagine. If you struggle with trying to control the people or circumstances in your life, consider if you may be in need of rest, encouragement or time to realign your heart through reading the Word, praying or spending time in the company of fellow believers. Our loving Father does not ask us to ignore the needs we long to have fulfilled, but to bring them to Him that He might show us love, comfort, care and guidance.

As you ask Him to help you surrender control, ask Him to fill you with “power, love and self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7b, NIV) promised in the Scriptures. We don’t have to wrestle those good gifts from our Father’s hands. He loves to give them.

{eoa}

 **Christine Hoover** is a pastor’s wife, mom of three boys, host of the *By Faith* podcast and author of several books. Her latest offering is *With All Your Heart: Living Joyfully Through Allegiance to King Jesus*. Previous books include *Messy Beautiful Friendship* and *Searching for Spring*. Originally from Texas, she and her family live in Charlottesville, Virginia, where they planted a church in 2008. Find Christine at her home online, .

This article is an adapted excerpt from Christine’s latest book, With All Your Heart, releasing in March 2020 from Baker Books.