

Finding Love for Your Mother-in-Law

“This is my **mother-in-love**, Deb.”

The young woman standing behind the counter in the green apron smiled at me and waved. She was Sarah’s Starbucks boss, and I was glad to meet her.

I was thrilled, however, with my **daughter-in-law’s** introduction of me. “Mother-in-love” was a sweet surprise, and I was once again reminded why this lovely girl had captured not only my son’s heart, but mine as well.

Sarah was the first of the young women to become my daughter through marriage. Our son Jordan met Sarah in the eighth grade, when they were 13. She was a cute little redhead who melted our hearts quickly. It wasn’t long before the two of them were in a full-on junior high school crush.

Jordan and Sarah married at 19. While his dad and I would have liked for them to be older, we supported their decision. They were quick to remind us that we, too, had married at 19—and look how well that turned out.

They had a plan, and when they requested our blessing, we gave it. Sarah lost her own dad when she was only 5. And though her mother would “give her away,” Sarah asked Jordan’s dad, Ron, to walk her down the aisle. He did so proudly, his eyes filled with tears.

“Mother-in-love” is what Sarah calls me when she introduces me to friends or coworkers. It touches my heart and makes me smile when she says it. It is a wonderful honor.

It also makes me think about the terms *in-law* and *in love*.

I was intrigued by the contrast of these two titles. Love versus law. The more I meditated on them, the more interested

I became. Where did the term *in-law* originate?

The explanation is simple: We are in-laws because of the legal joining of the couple. We are related according to and through the law.

Next on my quest was to understand what the term *law* means. What are its attributes? How does it serve? Who does it protect?

The **law** has specific qualities and characteristics that distinctly define it:

- The law limits and excludes.
- The law is a finite thing—black and white, inflexible, □ focused on minute details.
- The law is conditional—if you, then I.
- The law is of the mind and intellect.
- The law seeks to benefit itself; its only fulfillment is being obeyed.
- The law is without emotion and without mercy, and it pronounces judgment.
- The law demands a high price to be paid if it is not observed correctly.
- The law is designed to rule by power; it enforces norms and standards of behavior.
- The purpose of the law includes a coercive effect in regulating conduct. □

If a **personal** or **family relationship** is ruled by **law**, it leaves a lot to be desired, doesn't it?

The law is inflexible and coercive, enforcing standards established through harsh penalty. It is relationship based on the conditional proposition that if you do as I require, then I will not punish you, or I may even provide you with some benefit.

Sounds like some in-law relationships I know. Characterized by **demand** and **obedience**, inflexibility and personal preference,

these relationships choke out the potential for **family unity** and **harmony**. Grudges are nursed like babies at the breast. Walls are erected, bridges are burned, and the structure of the family divides like the waters of the Red Sea.

But love is quite another matter. The characteristics of love are very different:

- Love is a living thing.□
- Love overlooks, forgives and grants pardon.□
- Love includes and gathers in.□
- Love is easily satisfied and does not demand on behalf of itself.□
- Love is unconditional.
- Love is from the heart and seeks to benefit others at the expense of itself.□
- Love is fulfilled when it's invested and given away.
- Love is full of mercy.
- Love pays the price.

Now, that's more like it. There's an element of promise, hope and possibility in a relationship rooted and grounded in love. Look at these—law and love—side by side. The contrast is startling:

The law limits and excludes. The law is of the mind and intellect.

Love includes and gathers in; it is limitless; it is from the heart and seeks to benefit others at expense of self.

Jesus Himself gives us great clarity on the topic of loving one another.

Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37–39).

Christ calls the second commandment equally important. To love

our neighbor as ourselves is given the same priority as loving God with every bit of our being.

Love accomplishes what the law cannot. And love is a choice.

Christ chose to love us when we were anything but lovable. He knew every last secret, every shred of pride and rebellion, every ugly thought. All of it. He loved us still. And He asks us to do the same to a lost and dying world.

Demonstrating love on a daily basis is not easy. Some people are hard to love. They are difficult, arrogant, opinionated, prideful, selfish and the list goes on. It does not matter to Christ. To love those who are lovable is nothing special—those who walk without Jesus can manage that. He asks us to love those whose behavior is hurtful and damaging:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matt. 5:43–47).

That’s a tall order. Being civil is not sufficient. Love those who seem determined to take you down, to hurt and demean you. Pray for the ones who use you in a spiteful way. Remember that before we trusted in Christ, we were just as unlovely in the eyes of a perfect and spotless Lord Jesus. If we can’t or won’t make this our goal, we are failing to follow the foundations of life in Christ.

Love should define our lives as Christians and should be the backbone of any relationship and interaction we have. We are to model our love for one another after the love God has shown us. Love seeks to benefit others at the expense of itself. The

law demands to be satisfied at the expense of others.

You may be thinking at this point, “Check, please! You clearly don’t know my in-law. You don’t know what she’s done!” You are absolutely right, I don’t. But God does—and He sent His Son to die for her.

We can explore the really hard cases, where the level of animosity and anger has created a breakdown in the relationship. For now, though, in principle, we are asked to make a choice. Your relationship approach is a matter of choice.

If you choose to follow the character of Christ and demonstrate love despite the behavior of the other woman, you allow God to work through you and in her. You are responsible for the behavior you demonstrate. Let God handle the results.

Deb DeArmond is an expert in the fields of communication, relationship and conflict resolution. A writer and professional speaker, DeArmond focuses on topics related to the family and women. *Related by Chance, Family by Choice* (November 2013) is her first book and is focused on relationships between women-in-law. She is co-founder of *My Purpose Now*, a website devoted to Christian women 50+. Read more from DeArmond at [Family Matters](#) and [My Purpose Now](#).