

Practical Ways to Feel God's Love When Others Reject You

You believe what the Bible says: "God is love." But that can seem so intellectual, so "spiritual." Your heart aches for something more tangible, something your senses can appreciate. You want to feel that unconditional love from the people closest to you. You long for God with skin on. How can you feel God's love when others don't love you?

Just this week, Ann wrote to me; "I don't know how to love a god I haven't even seen." And Elisha wrote, "I want a clearer and more visible picture of God's love for me through the people I love."

In the world God intended, you *would* experience God's love through people. Parents would love their children unconditionally, and always provide them the guidance, acceptance and support they needed as they launched into the world and beyond. Spouses would love each other unconditionally, always offer affection, understanding, trust and intimacy, and support each other with forgiveness and encouragement. Believers would always provide a truly welcoming environment to those who struggle, eliminate gossip and destructive criticism, and offer guidance and support for continued growth and healing.

But our world is not that way. The majority of children grow up with less than they needed from their parents. Most marriages struggle with conflict, apathy or unmet needs. Churches, small groups and friendships are marred by inconsistency, superficiality and human brokenness. Abuse and neglect happen on many levels.

So if the people who *should* demonstrate God's love to you are not or cannot do so, how are you to experience God's love? Are

you doomed to painful lack forever?

Here are some practical ways to experience God's love when others don't love you, or love you very imperfectly.

These points focus on what *you* can do. You cannot change others, but you can take steps yourself to find healing, meaning, love and joy.

Choose Healthier People

Some people simply cannot or will not demonstrate love. Continuing to go to them for what they cannot provide is like going to a dry well for water; you will always end up disappointed, wounded and dry.

But you have a choice in the kinds of people you spend most of your time with. Jesus didn't give His time and energy equally to everyone; you too have a choice. Pray for and look for people who do demonstrate important aspects of God's love. As Mr. Rogers' mother would tell him, "Look for the helpers." If you did not or are not getting your love needs met from your parents or spouse or friends, search for other healthy believers who have something positive to give. You may need some new friends. Don't spend time worrying about what *should* be; look for other possibilities.

Love Someone Else

One of the most reliable ways to lift your spirits is to get your eyes off yourself and focus on meeting someone else's needs. There is always someone who needs something you have to give. Always. Yes, learn healthy ways to get your own soul filled up, but then focus more on letting whatever you have flow through you to others.

So how do you do that? If you feel as though you have nothing to give, just start where you are. If it's a smile, smile at someone. If it's a listening ear, give someone that gift. When

you see someone hurting, be there. As my friend Kristin said, you may be the only one offering this person a hug, and you don't know how long your hug may need to last them. It's a guaranteed law of God's universe that the more love you give, the more love will flow to you.

Go Straight to God

God is the ultimate Source of all love. That doesn't mean squishy softness; it means He accepts you just as you are, but also that He refuses to let you stay in your current miserable condition. He is determined to transform you into the glorious representation of Himself that He created you to be. And He won't give up until you become that. No human being can always be there for you; God can!

Learn what it means to take your brokenness to God and let Him change you. In prayer, pour out your sadness, loneliness, fear or whatever else holds you. Be yourself in His presence, in all your neediness. And then get quiet. Stay there in His presence long enough for Him to do something in your soul. Every time you enter His presence won't be the same, but keep going back over and over again. He will not let you down.

Choose to Believe in Eternity

We live in the in-between time. God's kingdom has come to this earth in reality (see Matthew 4:17) but not in completeness. If this world is as good as it gets, we're in trouble!

But thank God this is *not* the end. Many of the good things God has promised we do experience here and now, but some await eternity when God restores all things (see 1 Corinthians 2:9). God built us for eternity, and until then there will always be a part of our soul that is unfilled, longing, needy. Only in eternity will we experience enough—of joy, love, healing, peace, fulfillment or anything else we long for.

God built your heart to need Himself and to need eternity. Learn to hold that longing tenderly, as something priceless. And be assured that when you get there, you will be fully satisfied, fully healed, and know love beyond anything you can now imagine.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Your Turn: Where do you long to experience real love? Which of these four elements listed here do you most need to incorporate into your life now? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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