

The Secret to Walking in Love With the 'Unloveable'

In his book *The Singer*, Calvin Miller says that **love** often stands quite close to **hate**. "Like silent chessmen, side by side. Only the color of the squares is different."

Unfortunately, it's true. In one moment we can be **loving** and **honoring**, and in the next, hating and dishonoring.

We all know that we're commanded to **love God**, ourselves and one another—that there will be no **blessing** if we hate. Yet we cross the fine line between these two extremes in a heartbeat.

Whenever we diminish, dismiss, disregard or despise another's life, we move from one square on the chessboard to another, reversing the color of the squares upon which our hearts rest. If we remain there, the game may be lost.

It doesn't matter whether the dishonoring is toward those in **authority** over us or those under our own authority or even a neglect of ourselves and our need for boundaries and respect.

The principles are the same. **Valuing** is at the heart of love. If we are not willing to **honor** and esteem others, we will never love, no matter how hard we try.

Honoring Others

If we attach high worth to others' lives, regardless of their behavior at any given moment, we won't slander, despise, wound or neglect them. We will see them individually as precious to God and, therefore, precious to us.

When we remember well the weaknesses in our own lives, we'll find patience for the weaknesses in others. However, because we love them, we'll long for them to share in the freedom we have found in trusting God.

When we honor others, we'll begin to invest in our relationships. Recognizing every person's great worth to God, we can affirm other people and support them in pursuit of their dreams. Once we've earned an individual's trust through our faithfulness to them, we can begin to take steps to gently urge them to consider their choices in accordance with God's will.

Honoring Authorities

There is a vast difference between grieving over a wrong, making an appeal for change while you're trusting God, and condemning and spreading our chagrin to others. We must remember that only God is the judge of the world. When we play judge, jury and hangman, we are on dangerous ground—ground that supports the growth of arrogance and self-righteous rebellion.

David, of biblical fame, knew this. He remembered the greatness of Saul. He saw the king's tortured heart and grieved for him. But how do you suppose he managed to love this man who relentlessly sought to kill him?

Very simply, David honored Saul because he (David) honored God. David must have had a very astute comprehension of the authority God had established through the prophet Samuel's anointed choice of king (1 Sam. 9:15-16).

While Saul sat on the throne, David's respect for his authority and personhood superseded every logical design on earth. Every action of David toward Saul showed how highly he both valued and loved this mad king.

David spared Saul's life in the cave (1 Sam. 24:4-22) and again on the field of war while Saul lay sleeping (1 Sam. 26:1-12). David pleaded with Saul to remember his faithfulness to the king and cease his feverish pursuit (vv. 17-25).

Yet Saul persisted until finally he was defeated in battle and

fell upon his own sword. When an Amalekite soldier later delivered the news of Saul's death, David's troops were likely overjoyed, thinking at last David could take his place on the throne, bring the nation together and restore sanity to the kingship.

But David responded to the news of Saul's death by tearing his clothes, weeping and fasting until evening. He mourned for the king, Jonathan and the slain of the army of Israel—the very army that had pursued him all those years.

Furthermore, David composed a lament to honor the slain king and his son and ordered all of Judah to sorrow and sing it with him (2 Sam. 1:17-27). Instead of recounting all of Saul's weaknesses, the lament recounted his glory and strength.

David honored his enemy even in death. As an anointed leader himself, he esteemed an unworthy king worthy, not because of his actions but because of his authority and above that, his humanity.

Honor Those Under Our Authority

Honoring those who serve under our leadership is as important as honoring our authorities. In fact, we are believers today because of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ honored His Father and continues to honor those who serve and follow Him.

While He was on earth among His disciples, Jesus never reminded them of their shady pasts, their lack of education, the blunders they made while learning how to trust God—not even their betrayal and abandonment in His greatest hour of need.

Instead, Jesus attached high worth to those who followed Him. He confided in them and patiently explained spiritual truths in terms they could understand (John 15:14-16; Matt. 13:10-52).

Jesus listened to His disciples even when they were being petty (Mark 10:35-45). He made sure their basic physical needs were being met, prayed for them and shared His glory with them (Mark 8:1-8; John 17:22-26).

He looked beyond gender and economic status into His followers' hearts. Jesus both expected the best from them and made great promises to them that He kept.

Christ comforted the disciples in their weaknesses until the end. After He had seemingly left them at the cross, He reappeared to encourage them and told them how to carry on in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom He would send in His absence (John 20:19-31; Acts 1:1-8).

The way in which the Lord passed on the kingdom to his future leaders was flawless. With His blessing and anointing upon them, they turned the world upside down.

Jesus honored the men and women under His authority every step of the way. He never mocked or ridiculed them. Neither did He devalue or distrust those who walked with Him, even though, in their weaknesses, they failed at times.

Christ knew that His disciples would learn and that learning would take time. He lovingly invested that time. He valued them, and they knew it. In response, they were willing to give up everything to follow Him.

David, in honoring Saul, honored Jehovah; Jesus honored His Father God. Because they adhered to God's methods and plan, they did not fail.

Likewise, we will succeed in ministering effectively if we honor God and esteem those who lead us as well as those we are given authority to lead.

God has equipped us as women with many unique strengths that are needed for effective ministry and leadership. When we

value and esteem others, we can fulfill the requirements for both these roles extremely well.

However, when we disrespect authorities or treat those we lead as expendable tools for our own promotion, we fail to maintain godly relationships. Crossing the line from disrespect to hatred can become easy for us, unless we remember the lesson of Calvary.

Finding the Cross

As Christians we don't always do it right. At times when spears are thrown at us, we may pull one or two right out of the wall and heave them back. Or when we are betrayed by someone into whose life we have poured our own, we may be tempted to bitterly denigrate him or her to our friends.

Instead, we must return to the cross when we've been hurt and quickly repent of the temptation to be unforgiving. God will lovingly deal with the sin lodged in our own hearts and bring healing for our wounds, but if we have spoken bitter words toward another person, apologies must be made that are sincere and heartfelt in order to restore fellowship that is honoring toward her or him.

As ministry leaders, sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking we are the center of everything. When that happens, our leadership style can become dictatorial, and we resort to surrounding ourselves with "yes men" in order to retain power and keep our ministries going. At such a time, God, in His mercy, will become the Hound of Heaven, pursuing us with conviction until we humble ourselves at His feet.

We must find our way to the cross. It is the most important path we will travel in life. And we will do it time and time again.

Every time we will discover that the joy of repentance and the delight of being cleansed as we forgive will never grow old.

Honoring relationships are re-established when we repent of our sin. As Jesus reassures us of His love, He clears our vision and sets us right again.

If it is our desire to refrain from dishonoring others, then daily we must pray this prayer of David's: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24, NIV).

Then God will show us our weaknesses and give us grace to love others and lead them unselfishly. In His presence, through worship and prayer, we will experience His humility.

We will be changed into His likeness, and as we are, our natural tendency will be to acknowledge the worth of those He created, for His leadership will take root in our hearts.

Read a companion devotional.

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