

Why So Few Christians Have Had a Radical Encounter With God's Love

When I first came to Bethel Church, one of my primary roles was counseling. I counseled about six people a day, four days a week, for about three years. Most of the people I worked with would identify themselves as Christians. Nearly all of them could quote (and often would quote) John 3:16, which reads, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." But I rarely met with people who had actually experienced the love of God. They stored truth in their heads, but somehow it never made the 18-inch journey to their hearts.

We've talked about the importance of having needs and prioritizing your emotional needs as much as you would your need to eat or drink water. Of course, we have various needs such as for attention, to be known and to be seen, but one of the greatest needs we have is to feel loved. In some ways, it's true that "all you need is love," especially when you examine the Bible's definitions of love. I am convinced that wars would cease, crime would plummet, divorce would diminish and immorality would fall if the human race just experienced these three words: You are loved.

3 Ways to Live

There are three main ways we tend to approach meeting the needs of our souls: inactively, reactively or proactively.

1. Inactive

You are inactive when you remain ignorant of the condition of your soul. In the inactive mind-set, you embrace your desperate need as an unwanted yet necessary part of life's process. Then you work hard to convince yourself that love,

acceptance, attention, approval and significance are not necessities but choices that can be opted out of. Maybe you don't try to meet the needs of your soul because you want to be spiritual, so you wear your dysfunction as a badge of honor. Or worse yet, you bury your needs so deep that you can't consciously remember where you even put them. Life just happens to you when you live inactive. Eventually, you find your soul existing in brokenness, emptiness and loneliness.

2. Reactive

You are reactive when you acknowledge your soul's needs but then fulfill the needs in dysfunctional ways. This is the proverbial "looking for love in all the wrong places" scenario. Living reactively often leads to all kinds of extremely dysfunctional devices that never fulfill your need to be known deeply or your desire to be loved for who you are. The fruit of this reactive lifestyle may be sexual promiscuity, pornography, fantasy, selfish ambition and so on—anything that gives you the sense of being known, feeling powerful and feeling loved. Yet instant gratification has horrible side effects. Typically, people who live this way for any length of time have a trail full of broken relationships that follow them.

3. Proactive

You are proactive when you wisely assess the needs of your soul and then devise a healthy strategy to meet your needs. Metaphorically speaking, you stop eating out of dumpsters, and you start planning your meals. One of the most basic ways to do this is through the power of love. You need a deep understanding and acceptance of love to seep so powerfully into your soul that it overflows out of you and into the hearts of others.

Proactive in Love

Believing you've experienced love because you have a biblical

definition of it—or because you’ve memorized all the verses about the love of God in the Bible—is not only deceptive, it’s also destructive. Think about it: Why would you continue to press in to experience deeper levels of God’s love if you’re convinced that there is nothing more to experience beyond the definition? In other words, what you know can keep you from what you need to know.

Are you proactively inviting God’s love into your life, or are you rather getting your needs met in a reactive way? Maybe you’ve even reached the point of inactivity when it comes to really living? Today I encourage you to take a minute, search your heart and ask yourself if you’ve truly experienced the transformational love of God. If not, invite Holy Spirit in. Silence the noise of busyness around you and quiet your mind so you can listen in to His voice. I pray peace over your mind today and grace over your heart to experience the tangible, supernatural love of God. I pray it seeps into every fiber of your heart and meets the deepest need we all have: to be loved. {eo}

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