

Loving Like Jesus: Put On Love

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14, NLT).

Love is the highest level of spiritual warfare. We are to “wear” it like a garment or armor. That’s why it’s so important to learn to love like the Bible says to: on purpose. But there are so many angry, wounded, unhappy people in the world. Angry people cannot love others because basically, they just don’t love themselves—and you can’t give away something you don’t have.

Don’t get me wrong, I understand there are numerous reasons for people’s pain. A lot of times people have been mistreated, many from their childhood into adult life. I’ve shared my story openly about how my father abused me sexually from a very early age. I grew to believe that it must be my fault—that there was something wrong with me that made him do that. I became ashamed, embarrassed and *angry* about my life. I didn’t like myself, much less love myself.

How I felt about myself became a major part of how I acted and treated others. Even though I gave my life to Jesus when I was very young, it was years before I began to comprehend the power of God’s love. So I understand the fact that hurting people hurt people.

What I had to learn—and most of us have to learn—was to love myself. You need to first receive God’s love and then learn to love yourself in a balanced way before you can truly love your neighbor as yourself. So, learn to love what God loves: *you*.

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God's love will change you. It will make you a happier, kinder, more generous person.

I'm reminded of a story about a young boy who came to his mother and presented her with his "bill" for chores he'd done around the house that week. For cutting the grass, his charge was \$5; for cleaning his room, \$1; for running to the store, 50¢; \$1 for taking out the garbage; \$5 for a good report card; and on he went until he gave her the grand total of \$.

The mother looked at the bill, turned the paper over and wrote:

For the nine months I carried you while you were growing inside me, NO CHARGE; for all the nights I sat up with you, doctored, and prayed for you, NO CHARGE; for all the trying times and the tears you've caused through the years, NO CHARGE; for all the nights that were filled with dread and all the worries I knew were ahead, NO CHARGE; for the toys, the food, the clothes and even for wiping your nose, NO CHARGE. She finally said to him, "Son, when you add it all up, the cost of my love is NO CHARGE!"

The boy finished reading what his mother had written and with tears in his eyes, he turned the paper back over and wrote across his bill: PAID IN FULL.

True love is free. Real love is not something we can "charge" people for. We must not try to make someone pay for our love: "If you're nice to me, I'll love you." "If you do things for me, I'll do things for you." That's not the kind of love of God calls us to. To love like God does, we have to make up our mind that we're going to do it on purpose.

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Many times, that will mean choosing to love regardless of how we feel about a person. There will be times we will be called to love difficult people or those who have hurt us in some way. We must learn to look beyond the person or what they did to hurt us to what the enemy is using them to do. As long as we are angry or hate someone for what they've done, we will be the one who is being tormented.

I know I said real love is free. But there is a cost involved for the one who loves. It's called *sacrifice*. As I've studied love in God's Word over the years, I've learned it is something we must do on purpose, and if we will make the sacrifice to "put on" love and walk in it, our feelings will catch up.

A minister once told a story about a wife who wanted to divorce her husband. She said she hated him, not only wanting to divorce him, but to hurt him as much as he had hurt her. The minister suggested she try something before she went through with the divorce. He told her to go home and act as if she really loved her husband. He told her to tell him she loved him, to praise him for every good thing she could think of, to go out of her way (sacrifice) to be as kind and generous to him as she possibly could, to spare no effort to please him, to make him believe in her undying love for him. Then, he told her, drop the bomb and tell him she was getting a divorce. That would *really* hurt him.

She willingly followed the plan with enthusiasm, playing the part of an adoring wife, acting as if she loved him while thinking how much it would hurt when she told him she was getting a divorce. But she never called the minister back to report. So when he called her after two months to find out if she was ready to get her divorce, the woman replied, "Divorce? No, never! I've discovered that I really do love him!"

Now, I'm not advocating for that preacher's advice; we must follow the Holy Spirit's lead in each situation. But the point

is, God does amazing things in a person—or in yourself—when you walk in love toward them ... especially when it's difficult. The bottom line is that giving real love is free. But let it cost you the small sacrifice of your time and effort, because that place of sacrifice will be the place of your breakthrough.

When you put on love and walk in love toward others in obedience to God, you are fighting the highest form of spiritual warfare. And absolutely nothing or nobody will be able to keep you from being blessed!

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