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Love That Lasts

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CHAPTER ONE
LOVING GOD BACK



God is love.
1 JOHN 4:8

GOD LOVES US WITH ALL HIS HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND strength, and that is how he wants us to love him back. For this we need Jesus. But for this we have Jesus if we are Christians. Without Jesus we cannot love as God loves. We cannot love him, we cannot love ourselves, and we certainly cannot love others.

God has created us with the capacity to love him fully as he fully loves us. That is why there is this huge need inside our hearts to love and be loved in return. God put it there! Once we find God, we discover how much he loves us, and we find the capacity to truly love others.

There is certainly a longing for intimacy, especially since the infamous horror of September 11, but most people are turning to each other for comfort and fulfillment, and not to God. After the first surge back to church, it's business as usual. People are once again making the elementary mistake of looking first to other people rather than to God to meet the love hunger inside them.

The heart is a lonely hunter until it finds God. For this reason there is a universal search for a love that works and lasts, for a love that, as J. B. Phillips puts it, knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything (1 Corinthians 13:7).

LOVE IS MORE THAN A WARM PUPPY

I was visiting a Christian campus where I had been invited to speak in chapel. Not everyone who attended that school was a Christian,

but the majority were from Christian homes. One night I was invited into the girls dorm for a chat. A group of college kids wanted to talk to me about their favorite subject, and so we were discussing what real love is all about.

Define it for me, I suggested.

I think love is a warm puppy, someone volunteered.

Actually, I answered, love might be a wet puppy, but love is a whole lot more than warm or wet puppies!

Love is never having to say you are sorry, someone else added.

Well, I countered, only love really knows how to say its sorry, and thats something all of us need to learn to say many times a day.

Love is a feeling too big for words, another announced somewhat emotionally.

But what happens when love doesnt feel like loving anymore? When the feeling that was too big for words shrinks to nothing much at all, we wonder what we saw in the person in the first place. What sort of love is that? I inquired. We decided that was a big part of the problem. Love doesnt seem to last.

People move in and out of relationships so easily, according to how they feel, commented Jennifer. If someone doesnt feel loving anymore, he simply shrugs his shoulders and says things like, People change. Thats how it is! I didnt plan it this way, but thats the way it goes. Good-bye!

She sounded as if she knew what she was talking about.

My dad just told my mom he didnt love her anymore, a sweet little thing offered. Took her out to dinner while his friends emptied her stuff onto the front lawn. She couldnt even get into the house when she came back home!

Thats exactly what my mom did to my dad, added the girl sitting next to her.

You and I need to talk, said the first. It sounds like we have a lot in common!

The girls talked on, feeling secure enough among their peers to share their hurts and their hearts. They spoke not only of their own agony but also that of their parents. They talked with obvious pain

of watching dads and moms split up, of the ongoing trauma of court battles that affected them deeply yet excluded them from the process and seemed to have no end.

I don't want to go home this semester break, offered a pretty girl. My father moved out after I came to school this spring, and I can't face going back yet. Anyway, where do I go? To my mom's house or my dad's apartment? I don't want to make either of them mad, and I want to support both.

Wait till you have to go home and meet the three new kids who are living in your house. There they are, sleeping in your bed and wearing the clothes that you left behind, and you are expected to be thrilled about it all! I was told to start calling them my stepbrothers and stepsisters and to move over and make room for them in my life, murmured a sober-looking senior sipping a Coke.

I'm never going to marry, announced a beautiful redhead. After watching my parents struggle, I'm scared I would fall out of love too, and I don't want to hurt someone like that.

Don't you think that's selfish though? asked a tall sporty-looking girl in a sweat suit. I still think that love is worth the risk. After all, we can learn by our parents' mistakes and choose right.

It's not about choosing right, answered another girl. It's just that people change. It even happens among Christians.

There was a chorus of voices as the girls said that their parents were Christians and they could hardly see the difference between marriages in the church and those out of it. I sat still, absorbing the impact of all of this, realizing the absolute carnage that has taken place in the last twenty years.

DISAPPOINTED BY LOVE

I was listening to the first generation of the new millennium talk about their disillusionment, their severe disappointment with God, life, and love. Most were kids that loved the Lord and loved their parents but were wondering whether it was safe to love anyone else! I thought of the fifteen-year-old I had once met who asked his mother how people who had loved each other so much could hate

each other so much all in one lifetime. This generation is fast becoming as concerned about their parents' heart affairs as they are about their own.

We have succeeded in raising a broken generation, I thought. These young people would face challenges in their relationships we never had to face in our day. What happened to their parents cast a shadow over the way they thought and acted in their own friendships and growing relationships. And it also changed what they believed about what Scripture says about marriage.

As if she had read my thoughts, a sophisticated-looking youngster looked up and said, Well, they say that by the time we are getting married, marriage to the same spouse for a lifetime will be both unusual and unnecessary! They say we will have different partners for different stages of life. It could make a whole lot of sense, she added somewhat breathlessly. I mean, you might be a perfect partner for raising kids but not a good companion when your kids are grown and gone. Changing partners isn't all that crazy an idea!

There was silence for a moment. After all, this was a Christian campus! Any such radical statement should bring some appropriate response, but to my amazement, no response was forthcoming.

And who are they? I inquired, breaking the silence.

The experts, she answered firmly.

Experts at what? I asked.

At knowing what they are talking about. They say that statistics show

But we're not statistics, burst out a cute redhead. We are people who somehow know that this is not the way things ought to be! When will the people we love best in our lives quit picking and clawing each other to death?

Now we were getting somewhere!

What do you think is the way things ought to be? I asked her gently. Are there any rules? Is there an ought at all?

I don't know anymore, she answered somewhat desperately. All I know is this mess can't be the way God meant us to treat each other. It can't be!

And it isn't, I said firmly, smiling encouragingly at her.

It isn't? she asked hopefully.

It isn't what God had in mind from the first, no. Then we got down to business. There are many kinds of love, so we should define our terms before we go any further, I began. And this is what I told them.

GOD IS LOVE

The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). But what sort of love is he made of? Warm fuzzy feelings? Love that quits loving when it is not reciprocated? Is his love conditional I'll love you if you love me? Does he promise to love me only if I'm good, if I don't sleep with my boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage, or if I'm pretty? Does he expect me to say my prayers, go to church, and read my Bible before he will love me back? What *do es* the love of God look like? How does it behave? How can I describe it?

The young women listened attentively as I explained that the Greek language has several different words that English translates simply as love. Those words describe different kinds of love. The word that Paul uses to describe love in 1 Corinthians 13 is *agape*. This word refers to unconditional love. It means that God loves without conditions, irrespective of our reaction or response. It is love God style, not love American style, or Western style. It is a love that is willing to be rejected and still love on. It is a love that loves the unlovely. It is a love that lays down its life for its friends. Human beings are incapable of loving this way. In order to do this, we need the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Other Greek words describe the kinds of love that we experience. For example, there's *phileo*, which pictures friendship love. And there's *eros*, the feeling too big for words sort of love, the love we feel for a boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse. But rarely do we experience *agape* love.

Imagine what it would be like if we could love others as God loves us. Why, that would revolutionize the world! Yet this is exactly what God requires of us. When we become his children, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts and begins to grow his fruit, one of which

is love agape love (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit within us then enables us to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbor as much as we love our selfish selves. God does not tell us to do anything that he does not enable us to do! He himself is the enabling of all of his commands.

So how do we respond to this news? How does the love of God get into our hearts in the first place? Well, not without an invitation!

Love has good manners (I Corinthians 13:5, Phillips). The love of God comes into our hearts when we invite Jesus by his Spirit to come into our lives.

NOT THE WAY THINGS OUGHT TO BE

Let me tell you what happened to me. I was a much-loved child. My father loved me and my mother loved me and my sister loved me, and that was my world. In return, I loved them all back. I was a child of the Second World War, and so I became aware that not everyone loved me. Someone was dropping bombs all over my life in a regular fashion! I was only five years of age when the war broke out. We lived in Liverpool (not a very good idea as the Liverpool docks were a favorite nightly target of the enemy), so I spent many a terrifying night huddled in our air-raid shelter wondering what we had done and why so much hate had been let loose on my happy little head.

When all you have experienced is love at home, it is a puzzle to figure out why there is so much hate afoot outside it. Things were definitely not the way they ought to be! I knew it at that young age, yet no one explained anything to me. My parents were far too busy trying to keep us alive!

So I began to question the character of God. I didn't know what I was doing, but in my little mind I was trying to figure out why, if God was good, he made so many bad people. And if God was big and could do everything, why didn't he stop the war? How big was he anyway? No one was reading my mind, so I drew my own five-year-old conclusions and wondered on. It would be ten more years until I finally got some answers to the puzzles of right and wrong, good and evil, love and hate.

One thing, however, was abundantly clear things were not the way they ought to be. Somewhere deep inside I knew it. I knew with some strange God-given knowledge that there was a good God with a good plan and it had gone terribly wrong. And I was also sure that somewhere a loving God wanted to put everything right. I knew that he was horrified at the sinfulness of the human race. He wanted to reverse it all until right was triumphing over wrong and love prevailed. Love was the answer! *If all the people in the world would only love each other like my family does, I thought wistfully, then what a wonderful world it would be!*

Years later, when a girl called Janet explained that all my internal hopes were right, I could hardly believe my ears! She affirmed all my secret beliefs in the character of God and told me how I could know him for myself. I had been sure deep down inside that he existed, and I had no trouble asking for his help. Janet led me to Christ, and I walked into the arms of a God who loved me and gave his life for me. I heard him say very clearly, *You re right, Jill. Things are not the way they ought to be! First, let me put things right betw een you and me, and then let s work tog ether to put things right in the hear ts of people all o ver the w orld.*

LOVING GOD BACK

My heart ached with the joy of it all. God was a God of power, glory, and love. This was his world, and he wanted it back. He wanted to use me in his grand cosmic plan to do my small part! So God forgave me for Christ's sake, and I experienced a love that transcended all the other loves in my life. They paled into insignificance compared to the love I began to know from God and for God. I didnt love my loved ones less; in fact, I actually loved them more. I loved God the most and realized I could never love anyone with that selfless agape love unless I first loved him. He would enrich and enhance all my other loves.

How did you get him into your life? asked the girl with the sad eyes, the one who didnt want to go home for the semester break.

I turned to her, reliving my own conversion experience. I asked Jesus to come into my heart by his Spirit, I replied.

How did that work? she asked.

I said a simple prayer, asking him to forgive my sins and come into my life. I thanked him for dying on the cross for me because I had lived a life that was not what it should have been. I invited him to reverse the trend and direction of my life.

And did he? she asked breathlessly.

I answered simply. If he hadn't, I wouldn't be here!

There was silence. A silent shadow of love hovered over the room as if the Lord were saying to those sweet young women: Listen to her, she is telling you the truth. Why don't you come home to me like she did? I'm waiting. And then I invited them to pray with me. Many had made that personal invitation to Christ years ago. A few in the group had not.

For them, I knew life had only just begun a lifetime of learning what this life of love was all about. Jesus Christ by his Spirit had taken up residence in their hearts, and the possibilities of giving and receiving love a love that works and lasts had started. Their lives would take them to the far corners of the world and present new challenges of loving day by daily day. For this they would need Jesus. But from now on, they had Jesus!

I knew that the Bible describes such brand-new converts as newborn babies who need to grow into Christian maturity. My work was cut out for me! I needed to set about a plan to feed them. Babies exhibit need love. If you don't believe me, hang around a newborn infant who's hungry! Peter told the new Christians to cry out for this nourishment as a baby cries for milk, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness (I Peter 2:2-3). My new babies were going to need the milk of God's Word.

DISCOVERING GOD'S LOVE

As new converts to Christ begin to read, mark, and inwardly digest the Scriptures, they grow spiritually. Paul uses an analogy for this kind of growth in I Corinthians 13:11. He writes, When I was a

child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Children act like children, but one day, if things are normal, children become adults and behave like adults. They put away childish things. In the context of the chapter, Paul means that as believers mature in their faith, they learn how to love as God loves. A baby needs to be loved but does not know how to love in return. But eventually the baby grows up and learns how to give love as well.

Believers need to learn how to love as God loves. They need to move from just being loved to giving love or from need love to gift love. The key lies in the measure of spiritual maturity. The measure of our spiritual maturity lies in our ability to feed on the Word of God and grow up!

So how do we do that? asked one of the new believers. What do you mean, Get into the Bible and let the Bible get into you?

Well, what *did* I mean? I love the way young people don't let you get away with Christian clichés!

Well, what I mean is that you buy yourself a Bible if you haven't got one and you begin to read it! I said.

Where do we start to read?

Try John's Gospel, I suggested.

Why John's Gospel?

Because that's one place you can get to know Jesus. It's an eyewitness account of his life. You can follow him through the pages of the Gospels. You can watch him heal a leper; listen to his sermons and illustrated talks, called parables; follow him to Jerusalem; stand at his cross; visit his tomb; and meet him in the garden like Mary Magdalene did. Yes, start in the Gospels, and learn to love him. This they understood, and away they went to begin to feed on this food we call Scripture.

Of course, I told them that as they learned the behavior God expects of his followers from the Bible, they would need to obey.

How will we do that? they inquired.

Think about what you are reading, I replied. Whenever you

come to a command, underline it in green. Then go out into your day and try to do what it says.

I was on campus for a week, which gave them a chance to report their progress to me. They were soon back saying that they had found a big command in Johns Gospel that they didnt have a clue how to obey.

W hat is it? I asked them.

I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other, they quoted from John 13:34.

Ah, I said, you found it!

It doesnt seem a fair imperative, objected one of the girls. You cant command someone to love you.

It would be fun if you could, laughed her friend.

If love is only a feeling, you cant, I answered. You cant command someone to feel love, so dont you see, love must be more than a feeling?

Lik e what?

Lik e actions, I replied.

Actions without feelings? That sounds cold and sort of un - loving!

Well, why dont we study what real love is all about? I asked them. I m here for a few more days, so we could get a start. The small group agreed to meet together and begin this grand adventure. T he place to start, of course, is I Corinthians 13, I said.

W hy?

Because in this letter Paul wrote to a lot of unloving people and showed them how things could be different. Paul defines and describes and shows us how love works.

With Bibles in hand we started an investigation into the heady subject of real love. Using the book of I Corinthians as a guide and the Gospels as an illustration of love walking our planet in the person of Jesus Christ, we learned life-changing things that made us people who would never be the same again. I invite you to start this grand adventure too.

LOVING GOD STYLE

God is love, and as we noted above, his love is much more than a nice feeling that may or may not last. So what does this God-style love look like?

First of all, God is three persons—a Trinity. This is very hard for us to fathom because we don't have any concrete analogies for it. The Trinity refers to the three persons of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We can relate to the fact that God is a Father because we all have fathers. The fact that God is a Son is fairly easy to grasp as well. But God is a Spirit? What does that mean? We haven't seen one of those. But what we learn from the Bible about this mysterious and glorious God is that he always existed in three persons and that he is love. These members of the Trinity have always loved each other, forever and ever. We are explicitly told in the Gospels, for example, that God loves his Son.

Twice God's voice is heard from heaven reiterating this fact. At Jesus' baptism by John, a voice from heaven announced, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you" (Luke 3:22). Then again on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were there to hear that same voice say, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 17:5). Jesus was the Father's beloved One, his One and Only (John 1:14, NIV).

It follows, then, that the Father loves those who love the Son! Jesus himself said: "The Father himself loves you dearly because you love me" (John 16:27). And in his prayer to his Father about us, Jesus said, "You love them as much as you love me" (John 17:23). That God loves me as much as he loves his Son staggers my mind! Do you believe that God loves you as much as he loves Jesus? That will give you a sense of self-worth in a hurry!

Let me use an illustration to help us understand why God would love those who love his Son.

Years ago our eldest son was leaving for college in Minneapolis. I was to be out of the country with my husband when he went. I couldn't wait to get back and travel up to the Twin Cities to see him and find out how he fared. His sister went with him to help him set-

tle in, and a good friend of ours who lived there met them at the airport. The same friend picked me up for my visit, and I thanked her profusely for all she had done to help Dave. She told me all about it, and then she suddenly said, Oh, Jill, I do love your son! Up to that moment she had just been a friend; but as soon as she said that, a warm feeling enveloped me, and I decided she would undoubtedly become one of my closest and best friends in the whole wide world! What made the difference? Her statement of love for my son drew me closer to her than before.

So it is with God. When he looks down from heaven and sees us kneeling in prayer saying, Father, I love your Son, something happens in his heart. He loves us for it. It gives him special pleasure. Yes, God loves all of us, but he especially loves those who love and respond to his Son.

But God not only loves those who love his Son, God loves those who hate his Son, too. This is what distinguishes agape love from all the other kinds of love. God loves his enemies! We know this to be true because he demonstrated such love for those who were crucifying him: Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).

In fact, without God's love for his enemies, none of us could have been saved! We all were his enemies before we came to repentance and faith in him. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8, NIV). In fact, we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies (Romans 5:10).

This puts agape love in a class all by itself. This sort of love is unconditional love. It is not a feeling too big for words, and it is a world away from being like a warm puppy! It is love defined in terms of what love does. It is demonstrable love. It is not, I love you *if*. It is I love you *even if*. It is love that is totally committed to the well-being of the other person, irrespective of the cost to itself. It is love that does the right thing for the beloved even when it doesn't feel like doing it. I assure you that love in the shape of Jesus did not *feel* like

hanging on the cross! God-style love is agape love gift love at its best.

Now the thing that blows us away is the fact that Jesus says to his disciples, Love your enemies! (Luke 6:35). For this we need Jesus, but for this we have Jesus!

So God-style love is love that is unconditional. He does not say, Fulfill the conditions and I will love you or, I will love you if you are pretty or if you're good or if you perform acceptably. He says, I will love you period!

It was this realization of God's great love to me that broke my heart and drew me to Christ. I had lived eighteen years of my life as his enemy. Some verses of one of my favorite hymns sum it up:

*God made me for himself to serve him here,
With love sincere service, and in filial fear,
To serve him here, for him to labor now
Then share his Glory where the angels bow.*

*And I poor sinner cast it all away,
Lived for the toil and pleasure of each day.
As if no Christ had shed his precious blood,
As if I owed no homage to my God.*

*Oh, Holy Spirit, by thy fire divine
Melt into tears this thankless heart of mine.
Teach me to love what once I seemed to hate,
And live for God before it be too late.*

God's love transcended all that my thankless heart had done to him. The truth of that love broke me and brought me to the Cross, where I sobbed my way home! The love of my parents and sister was one thing; the love of God was quite another. I realized that no man could ever love me enough, no child could ever love me enough, and no parent could ever care for me enough only Jesus. He loved me so that I might love.

It is possible to live our entire lives as if Christ had not died for us. Plenty of people do just that. But many times this happens be-

cause they have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel. Loving God includes making sure people around us hear the good news that Jesus loves them, died for them, and wants to forgive their sins and come into their lives.

THE BATTLE TO LOVE

God knows how to love. He is very practiced at the art because he has been doing it forever! By giving us Christ by his Spirit, he has given us the power to love as he does.

Our problem is that we try to love each other using our own phileo love, which is friendship love, or eros love, which is sensual love. We need to put our human loves into the hands of God and submit them to him. We must ask him to rule and fuel them, to govern them, and to command them to obey. This way we are not relying on our own energy to sustain the kind of love only God can sustain.

In this book I want to talk about some of the loves of our lives. Love for a spouse, for children, for parents, and for friends. Love for the church, for the lost, and for the found. Love for rich little poor people and for poor little rich people. Love for mission and love for work. And of course, love for grandchildren!

As I take a backward look at my life and a forward look at my future, lacing all this together is my love for God and his precious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. My poor, human love has been fanned into flame by his grace and his Spirit. He is the secret and source of all my other loves. Loving God comes first. Loving him is our primary calling. To love him in the happy times and the sad times, the rich times and the poor times, the young and the old times is the key to everything of worth in life.

And what of the battle to love? What about the selfish core of my heart that loves only me, supremely and arrogantly? Will I write of that? How can I not? For this is the battle of all battles; it is where we experience our greatest victories and our worst defeats. The problem is that we were born with a spy in the camp, an enemy within. We were born with a bias in our souls—a bias to self-cen-

teredness, self-aggrandizement, self-absorption, self-indulgence, and self-destruction. This center core must be subdued by love the love of God. Until I figure out how to let God get the victory in this battle over self, till love dominates my thinking, my actions, and my very soul, I will find no release.

The Bias to Sin

Its a bit like the game of bowls not the bowling game you have in America but the staid and proper game that is played in England. This game consists of rolling a large black bowl (ball) toward a small white jack (a smaller white ball) on a superbly manicured piece of English grass called a green. The idea is to get the big bowl as close as possible to the jack without touching it. This might sound really easy until you consider the fact that the bowl has a heavy weight (called a bias) placed inside it. This bias constantly pulls it off center.

This is a good illustration of sin. Because we are born with this bias inside our souls, it doesnt matter how straight we are aimed at a target, or who aims us, sin pulls us off center! Our parents may do their best to keep us on course. Our Sunday school teachers or youth leaders may roll us as accurately as possible toward the goal, but that wretched, corrupted core is sometimes too strong for us. Time after time, we veer to the left or to the right.

I can testify to this. My parents aimed my sister and me in the right direction. They sent us to the best schools, were the best role models, taught us moral values, and let it be known they expected the best of us. Yet the bias of sin pulled me constantly off course.

When someone said right, I said wrong. When I was being taught the right way to live, I immediately tried to figure out a way to get around the system. No one explained that I was a weighted bowl with a sin bias working against me! So I rationalized what my conscience told me was wrong and called it growing up instead! I chloroformed my conscience and sinned as often as I saw fit, hoping my parents would not find out!

My sister did a better job of staying on course than I did. She

warned me that it would kill Dad if I got pregnant or was caught cheating at exams. That salutary warning caused me brief concern, but the world opening up to me was too exciting to let these minor details trouble me for too long. Soon I was happily careening off course again. I have nothing and no one to blame but myself for the deceit and sin that I began to enjoy.

The Autumn of Discontent

Sin is pleasurable; otherwise we wouldn't be so tempted! The Bible tells us that Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Hebrews 11:25, NIV). However, the devil doesn't tell us that sins pleasures last only for a short season! After a summer of fun comes the autumn of discontent followed by the winter of despair.

This wretched bias to self-gratification needs a counterbias. But we can't do it on our own. We need the presence of Jesus within us. When he lives his life in us, sin will not have dominion over us. A change will take place that gives us the power to love God and love others. What joy! What release and relief!

So where do you see yourself? Struggling with the bias you were born with? Practicing deceit? Enjoying the pleasures of sin? Rationalizing it all and calling it being mature? Would you like to be free of such self-obsession? Christ can set you free! Just ask him. Borrow my words if it helps.

Lord Jesus, I am tired of it all. Forgive me for my self-worship. Come into my life and counter my horrible bias of sin. Set me free! Free to live for you and free to love for you. Scatter your love abroad in my heart by your Spirit as you promised to do. Thank you, Lord, for hearing and answering this prayer. Amen.

You see, we cannot live the Christian life. There is only one person who ever did, and that person is Jesus Christ. We can try to imitate his life the way he worked, the way he thought, the way he cared

for people, and above all, the way he loved people but we will severely fail.

There is a story told of a small boy who was given a hen as a pet. The small hen produced small eggs. One day the boy was at the zoo, where a large ostrich had just produced an egg. It was a large egg, but then what would you expect from a large bird! The little boy took a picture and had it developed. He took his photo down to the little hen, propped it up in front of her, and said, Look at this and try harder!

It is useless to prop up a picture of Jesus in front of people and say, Look at this and try harder! For this they need Jesus. But if you have just repeated the prayer I suggested, then for this you have Jesus! Once he is resident, he needs to be president. He must be King of kings and Lord of lords! He must master you so you can master yourself. He must be obeyed gladly and willingly, whatever he asks you to do. As he fills every part of your life, you will find yourself capable of doing things you have given up hope of ever doing. Things like loving him back, and loving your friends and enemies alike.

Whom do you need to love? God himself? Do you need more love than you can find for a child, a relative, a friend, or an enemy? I pray that by the time we have shared this book together, you will know the reality of God's love for every person you know!

MAKING IT MINE

These questions can be used for personal quiet time or adapted for group discussions. A notebook, a Bible, and a pencil would be useful.

Thinking It Over

1. Review the chapter. Which part of it alerted you to a problem in your life? Pause and pray about it.
2. Discuss or write a sentence about agape, phileo, and eros love. Define them in your own words.
3. Think about the illustration of the small hen and the ostrich egg. Why was it silly of the boy to expect the hen to try harder? How can you apply this illustration?
4. Do you know the Lord? Did you say the prayer to accept him into your life? Write a thank-you note to God about that.
5. Read I John 4:7-11. Do you believe it? Memorize it.
6. Make a list of ten people in your life you need to love. Thank God in advance for what he will do for them through you.

Praying It In

1. Be still and quiet until your focus changes from you to him. Don't move until you don't want to! Savor it.
2. Do you think you are more often focused on yourself than on anyone or anything else? Do you dominate your thinking? Would you like to change? Pray about that!
3. Think about the most difficult person to love in your life. Have you given up trying to love him or her? Why? Will you try again? Pray about that.

Prayer

Lord, I need you every hour. I need you to love you! Fill my heart with gratitude for your love. Keep me honest. Change my focus from myself to others. Give me release from being a prisoner of my own world, and help me see the people that you need me to love. Then give me the ability to love them.

Show me how to live in this world of love. Make me restless till

Loving God Back

I know what it is to love you with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I want to feel the wind of your Spirit in my sails, your Word in my mind, and your love in my heart every moment of every day. I cannot do this without Jesus. But for this I have Jesus! How can I ever say thanks? I love you the best that I know how, but I want to love the best that you know I can! Work this work in me, Lord. I submit my will to yours. Amen.

Living It Out

1. Think of one person who needs to hear something you have read in this chapter.
2. Make an action plan. When will you share this with that person? How will you share it?
3. Do it!