

Love should be the natural, normal way of life. We know, though, it certainly is not. We have all had those people with whom a loving relationship was difficult, even those who were supposed to (by definition) love us. And so, I have prayed at times for God to help some particular person on earth to love me. I knew that, as an imperfect being, I probably needed a lot of help; still, I wondered why it was so challenging.

I realize, though, the irony of asking this of God. He created us and so earnestly wants us to love Him, but then He has to hear our prayers that we want someone else to love us. He recognizes our need. When He created Adam, He did not keep man to Himself, but created Eve as a companion<sup>1</sup>. He created the marriage relationship to help us better understand God’s desired relationship to us as members of His family (church)<sup>2</sup>. We may not deserve His love, but His Grace makes us worthy through Christ.

God is always present to love us. He helps us with our relationships on earth, but He truly wants us to love Him more.

When I think of the common problem of our human weakness, I think of the father who brought his son to us so that we could drive out an evil spirit. This demon caused the boy to have horrible seizures<sup>3</sup>, and the father was upset because we could not provide healing. When Jesus arrived, he called us all an “unbelieving generation,” and wondered about our lack of understanding and faith.

The spirit threw the boy into a convulsion as soon as it sensed the presence of Jesus. When the father expressed doubt about the healing power of God, Jesus answered him, “Everything is possible for one who believes.” The boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”<sup>4</sup> Jesus then healed the boy and thus increased the faith of the man. He compared our faith unfavorably to a tiny mustard seed, a quantity which He claimed could move mountains<sup>5</sup>.

We all need help with our unbelief. But we truly need help with all of the important characteristics that must abide in us: faith, hope, and love. Along with faith, our hope needs to “overflow”<sup>6</sup>, but the greatest of these traits is love<sup>7</sup>. Faith the size of a mustard seed has great power<sup>8</sup>, but remember that the mustard seed grows into a huge tree<sup>9</sup>! If we apply that effect not just to the kingdom but to the concept of love, we see that we need to let our love grow without boundaries<sup>10</sup>.

I came to the realization that we are all weak in faith, but none of us have enough love either. I recall the time that Peter (after his three denials), was asked three times by Jesus if he loved Him. I imagine Peter’s frustration, acknowledging his failure, trying to answer. Perhaps in his final reply, he is saying possibly answering in a similar way: “I do love You; please help me overcome my ‘un-love’”.

It wasn’t that Peter did not love Christ, but that he had allowed his fear to overcome it. The result in the long term was that Peter lost that fear. He stood up in the midst of a largely hostile crowd and preached the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost, not many days later<sup>11</sup>. As there is no fear in love<sup>12</sup>, we must not let fear overcome our faith, either.

The Greatest Commandment<sup>13</sup> is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength.” I know how I get when I have done something with all of my strength: I become exhausted. So, it seems that we should somehow become exhausted when we are loving with all of our strength. It is appropriate, then, that we prostrate ourselves on the ground before him when we truly worship.

Jesus loved us with all of His strength, as He emptied<sup>14</sup> Himself, and poured Himself out from the cross. Before that event He had exhausted Himself in the wilderness<sup>15</sup>, and prostrated Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane<sup>16</sup>.

There are human examples to consider as well. The woman who invaded Simon’s dinner poured her heart out to Jesus through the tears that she shed to wash his feet and mix with perfume that she also poured out<sup>17</sup>. The widow who gave all she had, her two mites<sup>18</sup>, also exhausted herself in another way. And our brother Paul spoke of his being poured out like a drink offering<sup>19</sup>. All of this causes me to wonder if I am even coming close to loving with all of my being.

How can we measure the depth of our love? Is there ever “enough” of it? I think of how small it is compared to God’s love for us<sup>20</sup>, in that He gave His Son to die for us<sup>21</sup> even though we fail by far to measure up in righteousness<sup>22</sup>. All I know is that we grow in love by exercising love. Rather than thinking that we have achieved the proper level of love, we must ensure that we are continuing to increase our love for all.

When Jesus healed the boy that suffered from seizures, we asked why we could not cast the demon out. Jesus told us that this kind could only would come out by prayer<sup>23</sup>. Prayer is the means of developing more faith, and in a similar way, more love. Love really grows only through prayer. I think of it as the field in which seeds are sown<sup>24</sup>, and love grows beautiful flowers in a garden. And we must think of ourselves as being stewards of love as a resource – not being stingy doling it out, but making sure the flow continues<sup>25</sup>. The main idea is to love God more; the more we love God, the more we will love each other (and vice versa).

So, my prayer is that I can love God more and more as I live on. And I know this will help with my other relationships as well.

### References

1. Genesis 2:18
2. Ephesians 5:25ff
3. Mark 9:14-29; see also Matthew 17 :14-19 and Luke 9:37-45
4. Mark 9:24
5. Matthew 17:19-21
7. 1 Corinthians 13:13
6. Romans 15:13; May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
8. Luke 13:18-19
9. Luke 17:6
10. see 2 Peter 1:5-8
11. Acts 2:14ff
12. 1 John 4:18

13. Matthew 22:34ff, Mark 12:28ff, from Deuteronomy 6:5
14. Philippians 2:7
15. Matthew 4:1ff, Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1-13
16. Matthew 26:36ff, Mark 14:32ff, Luke 22:40ff
17. Luke 7:38ff
18. Mark 12:40-42 and Luke 21:1-3; also consider the widow who offered to give Elijah her last bit of oil and flour (before Elijah told her that God would replenish it)
19. Philippians 2:17 and 2 Timothy 4:6
20. 1 John 4:10
21. John 3:16
22. Romans 5:6-8
23. Mark 9:29
24. Matthew 13:1-15; Mark 4:1-12, Luke 8:4-10
25. 2 Corinthians 6:11-14

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