



Loving an “Unlovable” Mate

Loving a supposedly unlovable mate may seem impossible—and it is when we rely on our own strength. The impossible, however, becomes possible when the power of Christ’s love controls us.

Jesus demonstrated the dimensions of God’s love while here on earth. Apart from supernatural power, none of us can display the consistent love that Jesus modeled. Yet, by God’s grace, the healing and restoring love of Christ can resurrect marriages thought to be dead. This love, expressed by marriage partners, can do wonders in demonstrating the relationship that Christ has with His Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). Plus, Christ-like love provides indescribable benefits for both a husband and a wife.

Many verses reveal that difficulties between marriage partners result from a lack of biblical love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; Proverbs 17:9, 17; 1 Peter 4:8). Biblical love comes from a vital relationship with Jesus, willing obedience to God’s Word, and yielding to God’s Spirit. Contrary to a “feelings-only” kind of love, Christ-like love is grounded in commitment, not mere emotions. Feelings come and go, and a commitment to one’s mate that is grounded in love for the Lord may tremble, but it will never topple (1 Corinthians 13:8a, 2 Peter 1:10, Matthew 7:24-25).

Love, based strictly on feelings instead of Christ-like action, allows one to think, “I’ve fallen out of love,” which typically means “my feelings have flat-lined.” Instead of living as though feelings are the goal of a love relationship, a feeling-oriented believer needs to stop trusting the unreliability of feelings and trust solely in God’s reliability, as revealed in His Word. Lasting peace and joy can be realized when a believer makes decisions according to God’s Word instead of responding to the “ups and downs” of a personal, emotional roller coaster ride.

When we walk by faith instead of living by feelings, the blessings of biblical love can be experienced in our marriages, even in the worst of times. By God’s grace, we can love our mates by putting their interests—what is best for them as defined by God’s Word—ahead of any self-focus (Philippians 2:3-4). With this attitude, we can unselfishly encourage our spouses to grow in Christ-likeness. Relying on God’s strength, any of us can love our spouse even when he/she is seemingly “unlovable.” In other words, we can learn to love like Jesus loves us!

With God’s glory in mind (1 Corinthians 10:31), pray that the Lord helps you love your spouse as Christ loves him/her. It may come as a surprise that a failure to practice biblical love is an indication that one’s love for the Lord is anemic, at best, and non-existent, at worst (1 John 4:20-21). Expressing Christ-like love to your mate reflects your understanding and appreciation of God’s love for you. Biblically loving your mate, in spite of feelings, is proof that God has made a difference in your life (1 John 4:9-12). It also shows that you are committed to growing in God’s love and able to give heart-felt encouragement to your mate to be all he or she can be for Christ.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends . . .
- Proverbs 17:9**, Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.
- Proverbs 17:17**, A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.
- 1 Peter 4:8**, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.
- 2 Peter 1:10**, Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
- Matthew 7:24-25**, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
- Philippians 2:3-4**, Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- 1 Corinthians 10:31**, So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- 1 John 4:20-21**, If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.
- 1 John 4:9-12**, In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.