IT'S ALL ABOUT A LOVING RELATIONSHIP

It is not about being 'religious'.

God only gave us two commands that are important and they both have to do with relationships

John Hendee

It is so simple. It is so clear. God gave us two commands to carry out. But over the centuries some men, yes even men of faith have messed it up by turning it into a system of beliefs, doctrines, buildings, religious laws, practices, services, holidays, etc. It has been messed up. Oh, that we could get back to what Jesus actually intended. What a difference it would make in our lives, in the world.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version@ NIV@ Copyright @1973, 1978,1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

It's ALL About Relationship

ALL as in everything, entire, complete, total, every little thing, lock stock and barrel, the works, whole ball of wax, whole enchilada.

This book has been designed for all new Christians, especially those who have gone through the four lessons of "The Answer." This is a follow up to those four lessons.

This is just an introduction to the issues that will be shared here. There is SO much more that you need to discover as you read and study the New Testament. It will be a never-endingprocess for the rest of your life.

We encourage those who have shared the four lessons with someone to continue on with them in guiding them through this booklet. You can figure out a schedule as to how to do so.

We have put together lessons based on the truth of the New Testament that our commitment and life with Jesus is ALL about relationships, nothing more and nothing less.

Our premise is the very command in the New Covenant which God has given to disciples of Jesus about improving our relationships with God or others. God's call to the world is to accept and live in His love.

EVERYTHING!

Every command in the New Covenant has to do with our relationship with God or with others.

They are all based on love and doing what is loving in the eyes of God, our creator.

There are no exceptions.

Our becoming a disciple of Jesus is totally about relationship and has nothing to do with manmade religion or as I like to call it, religiosity (trying to reach and be right with God through religious activities).

John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."

God came to earth in the person of Jesus to make himself known to us so we too could be in close relationship with him.

As a new follower of Jesus, we want to encourage you to focus in on that relationship. We will challenge you to take off your religious glasses, that is seeing what you read in the New Testament as having to do with religious teachings, instructions, rules, ordinances, practices, etc. and instead put on your relationship glasses, seeing every command you read in the New Testament in terms of building your relationship with Jesus and others.

If you didn't have the opportunity to be taken through the four lessons of "The Answer" we encourage you to go to this web site and over the next week or two and watch them there. You are always welcome to go back and review them. www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

If you click on the cover of "The Answer," it will open and you can download the copy; you can also print off a copy. The four video presentations are then found at the lower left. Click on each one in order and follow along. Each lesson is about 30 minutes long.

God summarized the calling and purpose of the life of a disciple of Jesus in just **two commands**:

Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself."

The New Testament shows us how to carry out those two commands in our daily lives.

RECEIVE IT, LIVE IT, ENJOY IT, SHARE IT

That is it. Oh, there are a lot of other instructions, teachings and directions in the New Testament but if you will read them with your **relationship glasses** on, you will see that all the commands are about our relationship with God and with others: Everything. It is ALL about receiving God's love and then being loving as God defines love; selflessly giving of oneself for the best interest of others. That is what God did for us. He limited himself, denied himself many things and suffered greatly in order to advance our best interest so we could be at peace with God, forgiven, filled with Him, learning from Him and preparing to spend eternity with Him.

Jesus promised the 'abundant life' to those who became his followers. It is a life abundant, full, and overflowing in strong, healthy, rewarding and loving relationships rather than involvement in religious activity.

Years ago I wrote a paper with a long title. It captures the essence of what we want to pursue here. The title was "The Incredibly Tragic Error of Becoming a Religious Person Instead of Getting Close to God." If you get close to God/Jesus you don't need man made religion. Most all manmade religions teach that you have to 'earn' their god's love or salvation. That is a deadend pursuit.

In Jesus, God showed us how much he loves us and takes us as we are. He then lovingly and patiently starts working in our life to help us become more loving, developing stronger relationships with him and others.

So put on your relationship glasses and never take them off. Wash your eyes and minds of the 'religious way' of looking at the New Testament and your new life with Jesus.

IT IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING.

Don't let others lead you down another path or you will lose what is most important.

I told the following illustration to a doctor one day. It came to my mind while I was listening to him complaining about his past religious experience which he had dumped years earlier. I used this to try to explain to him how following Jesus was different from seeking to be right with God by being religious. Let me share the illustration here.

IT WAS HIS TENTH BIRTHDAY

He was the oldest of four kids in the family. His tenth birthday was rapidly approaching.
But this year was weird. Unlike previous years no one in the family had said anything about the approaching day. He was mystified. As the days passed and the big day approached, his feelings went from mystified to amazed, to saddened and then on to depression as he realized they must have forgotten his birthday.

"How can you forget your oldest son's birthday?" he thought.

He was distraught.

The night before his birthday he lay awake in bed pondering the whole issue. He could hardly sleep. Morning brought no relief as he got up, went to the kitchen and no one said anything other than good morning. He walked slowly to school. He couldn't concentrate all day long. He dreaded the last bell. That meant he had to go home to the family that had forgotten him!

He took longer than normal going home. Half way there it hit him. It had to be a surprise party. There was no other explanation. He repented of all the mean things he had thought about his family. Now he

was more nervous than ever. He picked up his pace. He approached the front door and entered prepared for people to jump out from their hidden places yelling surprise.

The surprise? He entered the house. Nothing. It didn't happen. Nothing. Deeper depression. "Oh, they must be in the kitchen, he thought. He laid down his backpack and said out loud (as if to warn them). "I guess I'll go to the kitchen for some cookies and milk." No one there.

Auuggghhh! "How could it be?" He gave up.

He went back to the living room about to burst into tears and just then he saw his dad coming down the steps from his bedroom with two packages in his arms.

"Hi son, welcome home. Come sit with me on the couch."

They sat down. He was encouraged to see the wrapped gifts.

"Son, happy birthday. I'm sure you've been wondering what was happening." The son sat silently, having no clue as to what was about to happen.

"Son you are the first of the kids in our family to turn 10. Ten is a very special year in our family and you are the first to achieve it."

He hands his son the first package and asks him to open it. He did. Whoppee. A book. The tittle is "The Book of Life" by Dad.

The father explains, "Son, this is now the most important book you will ever get in your life. You must start reading it and studying it today. We will have regular lessons on it. You must learn it quickly. It will tell you how to live. Now if you can learn and do what this book tells you to do, without failing, when you turn 65 you will be fully acknowledged and accepted as my son and you will receive your inheritance from me."

The son is sitting in stunned silence trying to figure out exactly what his father is saying. It made no sense. His head was swirling. He didn't understand.

Without giving his son time to develop a response the father hands him the second package, a big one. The son slowly opens it not knowing what to expect and finds a large folded piece of soft material. He tries holding it up. He has to stand up in order to hold it up in the air, reaching up high above his head. It is some kind of robe or something. It is black with dark blue trim. A robe?

The father responds to his son's puzzled-looking face by saying, "You'll grow into it son. It has to last you all your life. It is a talking robe. From this time on any time you want to talk to me you need to put on this robe, go to the bottom of the stairs going up to your mom and my bedroom (oh by the way, from today on you CANNOT go upstairs anymore to be with us). call my name 'Father on the Second Floor', and if I can I will come to the top of the stairs and we can talk. Now in the back of the book is a CD that you need to listen to. It will teach you how to chant/talk with me in the future (My Father who is on the second floor, may I please speak to You?) You need to practice it and when you start getting it right, the tone, inflection, variations, etc., I'll listen. NOW if somewhere along the line you screw up at school, with work, with the police or something don't tell me. You go tell your uncle Fred. And Fred will tell me about it. Okay son, happy birthday. Do you understand it all? Any questions?"

Now, here is something for YOU to think about.

What do you think this son would be thinking about his dad and this family he was born into at this point? I've heard many different responses to that question. The most common is something like "Weird!"

And I agree.

And here is the point. While we would consider such behavior as weird in a family relationship we have been duped into thinking that it is okay for the pattern when talking about a personal relationship with our heavenly father. Some have been led to believe that it is normal in that realm! I propose it is also weird when talking about God, our Heavenly Father, and that it's not what the God of the Bible wants or has asked for. Many men with their religious ideas or philosophies have messed it all up. The have injected their own weird ideas or imposed them on what Jesus is all about. Doing so has been referred to as muddying up the waters of what life with Jesus is really to be like. And it is pathetic.

The truth as we will pursue it in this book, is that it is ALL about relationship; that is, a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father.

It comes down to an issue of Relationship versus Religion.

Man-made religion ensnares, enslaves, discourages and damages people. Unfortunately many who have become disciples of Jesus have knowingly or unknowingly started to turn the life of being a follower of Jesus into a religious life trying to keep a long list of manmade traditions, rules, programs, services, titles, ceremonies, rituals in order to gain the acceptance of their god..

These become their focal point or way of becoming right with God.

Take those religious glasses off. Put your Relationship Glasses on and never take them off.

I remember the day I got my first pair of glasses. I was in the eye doctor's office. He put the glasses on and adjusted them. I paid and walked out of the office. Once I got outside I was shocked. I just had to stand on the sidewalk and look. Everything was so clear and sharp. It was so exciting. I was amazed at how blurry everything had been and how getting new glasses made it so crisp, clean and clear.

It is the same when we take off the "religious glasses" and put on the "relationship glasses." That changes everything from darkness, blurred, fuzzy vision to seeing things as they ought to be, as they were intended to be and it is so exciting to be able to see all this so clearly. It changes everything.

Once having become a follower of Jesus you will spend the rest of your life getting closer to God and others. It is a journey. It is a never ending, life long process.

Love in any relationship can suffer if that relationship is ignored or something else is made more important. Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:12 that "*Because of the increase in wickedness, the love of many grow cold."*

In Revelation 2:4 God sent the message to Christians in Ephesus saying, *"Yet I have this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first."*

How does that happen? It happens by letting other things or people become more important. The same thing can happen in marriage. It can happen in our relationship with Jesus. It takes a lot of desire, effort and attention to maintain strong and healthy relationships.

We will see that in the New Testament there are what we will call **Relationship Builder Commands** and there are **Relationship Breaker Commands** or teachings. As you read through the New Testament you are going to see a lot of those pointed out for our benefit. God wants us to practice all the Relationship Builders and avoid or eliminate from our lives the Relationship Breakers. The reason is obvious. He wants to see all our relationships grow and become stronger. Our choices and decisions will decide whether we end up building and strengthening or breaking and damaging our relationships. He has gone out of his way to show us the best way. While we can't control the choices and decisions of others we can practice self-control.

We can know that God has done and will continue to do everything he can to bring people into a strong relationship with him and others. Then he will be doing everything he can to show us how to maintain those relationships and try to avoid anything that would damage or destroy them.

God wants us to learn from him, and to be like him, and treat all others with mercy and grace. As we read the New Testament, we will see his teachings and commands related to this. We will need to learn to act on them, do them out of love for God and others, not based on emotions or feelings.

God has treated us with mercy. Mercy means we don't get what we deserve. God treats us with mercy and he wants us to treat others with mercy (giving them what they don't deserve) rather than revenge (giving them what we think they deserve).

In Matthew 9:13 Jesus said, "*But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"*

God has treated us with grace. Grace means we get what we don't deserve. He wants us to treat others with grace which means giving them what they might not deserve in our mind. Paul said in Colossians 4:6 to *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt…"*

We need to learn what these two really mean and see how to actually carry them out in life. God will help teach us this through the scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

What follows in this short booklet is like a "Sampler Box" of chocolates. It will help get us started on the journey of building and maintaining healthy relationships with God and others.

It will allow you to see (taste) a few scriptures on a number of different topics as it relates to loving relationships. This is not meant to be exhaustive in scope but an introduction of beginning to read the New Testament with those Relationship Glasses. Spend the rest of your life reading the New Testament and finding more wonderful nuggets of truth to apply to your life. Enjoy.

THE ANSWER

Study Number One from The Answer*: It ALL starts with the love of God*

Everything good started with God. Life came from his love. Salvation comes through his love. It all starts with and comes from God. No man'made religion has the markings of love like God has revealed he has for mankind through Jesus. It ALL starts with God's love and ends with God's love.

It is somewhat summarized in Ephesians 2:4-10

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 3:17b, 18 *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*.

Romans 8:35, 37-39 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?.....No in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height no depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The God of the Bible stands out as a very unique God among gods.

Buddha is not known for his love for mankind.

Hindu gods are not known for their love for mankind.

Allah is not known for being loving toward mankind.

Satan is not known for being a god of love.

It is all different with the God of the Bible.

He is a God of love, doing all he can to win the hearts of all people and then doing what is for their best interest for eternity. He invites us to a relationship based on love. The Bible says He first loved us. I John 4:19 *We love because He first loved us.*

He is a God of love. I John 4:7-12 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

What is love? It is faithfully and intentionally seeking to advance another's best interest or do what is best for them.

Jesus is our model in how to do that. He is our teacher.

What do the following verses teach you about God's love?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Daily pray and thank God for his love.

Verse 1; John 3:*16," For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".*

Verse 2: I John 4:10, "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Verse 3: I John 3:1, "*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God."*

Verse 4: I John 4:16, "*And we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love."*

Verse 5: I John 4:18, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment."*

Extra resource, "Because God Loves Me" author unknown.

Because God loves me, he is slow to lose patience with me.

Because God loves me, He takes the circumstances of my life and uses them in a constructive way for my growth.

Because God loves me, He doesn't treat me as an object to be possessed or manipulated.

Because God loves me, He doesn't need to demonstrate his authority; He is God.

Because God loves me, He touches me. He wants to see me mature and grow in his love.

Because God loves me, He doesn't save up a list of my sins to beat me over the head with.

Because God loves me, He suffers when he sees that I'm not walking in his ways because he sees that I don't trust him.

Because God loves me, He continues trusting in me even at times when I don't trust in myself.

Because God loves me, He never says there is no hope for me; he patiently keeps working with me, loving and disciplining me in such a way that it is hard for me to understand the depth of his love for me.

Because God loves me, He doesn't renounce me even when many of my friends do.

Because God loves me, He stands with me when I have reached the end of my desperation, when I see the reality and I compare myself with his righteousness, holiness, beauty and love.

It is in a moment like that, that I can really believe the reality that God loves me.

Study Number Two from The Answer*: It is a heart matter.*

Whoever or whatever we give our heart to will totally determine how we will live our life. When we choose to become a disciple of Jesus, we surrender our heart, our entire being to him. Jesus pointed that out when he said "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." That means whatever we put our faith in for meaning and purpose in life will control our heart and head. Whatever we give our best to is what we love. Our heart follows our treasure or what we value most. Everything we do will be to follow and hold on to that treasure, whether it is Jesus or something or someone else.

When we surrender our will to Jesus, he begins to help transform us into more loving beings. He is our model and mentor. We learn from him.

What do the following verses teach you about your heart?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and thank God for his love.

Verse 1: 2 Corinthians 5:27,*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"*

Verse 2: Proverbs 4:11, "*Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*

Verse 3: Romans 5:5 , "*And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

Verse 4: Psalm 86:11, *"Teach me your way Lord that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart."*

Verse 5: Proverbs 3:5, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*

Extra resource: My Heart, Christ's Home. You can get it on Kindle Store. It is only $1.20

A short but powerful illustration.

Study Number Three from The Answer: *Love God*

Matthew 22:27-38, "Jesus replied, *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."*

Jesus is our model in how to do this.

Galatians 5:6 makes it pretty clear. *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* The ONLY thing that counts!

It starts with our trusting God and having confidence in him based on the historical records telling about his coming to earth to offer us salvation and eternal life. Our response to his love for us is to love him in return, loving him more than anything else in life. There is nothing more important than loving him and trusting him. Everything else in our future depends on this. Loving Him results in our being more loving to others.

What do the following verses teach you about love?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and tell God how much you love him and why.

Verse 1: I John 5:3, *"In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome…"*

Verse 2: Ephesians 5:2, "*Follow God's example therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Verse 3: I Corinthians 8:3, *"But whoever loves God is known by God."*

Verse 4: John 14;15, *"If you love me, keep my commands."*

Verse 5: Galatians 5:6, *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."*

Study Number Four from The Answer: *Stay close to Jesus*

We can only mature into what God wants us to be if we stay very close to Jesus. We see in John 15 that he says seven times, "remain in me…." 15:5, "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing."

Remaining in Him means staying very close to him and depending on him for all that is important in life.

Jesus is our source of life, our strength, our power, hope, joy, guide and more. If we fall back into taking him for granted, we will become weaker. There are many potential traps or distractions that can draw us away from Jesus: pride, lust, selfishness, deceit, anger, bitterness, lies, etc.

I did a series on marriage years ago titled "Keep Courting or Count the Cost." The idea was simple: if you don't keep courting your mate, doing loving, kind, helpful things, spending time together, telling of and showing your love, you will lose something and pay a price for it; the relationship will suffer. The same can happen with our relationship with Jesus.

What do the following verses teach you about remaining in Jesus?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and tell God how much you love him and why. How are you going to SHOW him this day or week that you truly love him?

Verse 1: Colossians 3:1-4, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."*

Verse 2: Hebrews 12:2, "*And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*

Verse 3: Colossians 2:6,*7, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*

Verse 4: Hebrews 3:*12, "See to it brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God…14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."*

Verse 5: Philippians 3:7-*11, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

Extra resource. Bruce Wilkerson, Secrets of the Vine, Kindle Store, $5.99 Short read but very powerful help in our life. It is about John 15 and abiding in Jesus.

Study Number Five from The Answer: *Love others*

"What the world needs now is love, sweet love." Oh, they are such nice lyrics for a song. Most everyone is in favor of love, thinks highly of being loving, thinks everyone should be loving, and I think most see themselves as being loving.

So, when God commands us to "love others as we love ourselves" it seems like a good thing, something we would be in favor of and willing to do. But with time we find out it can be very difficult. I have seen in life that it is much easier to be religious and go through the religious rites, ceremonies and practice religious traditions than it is to love everyone.

It is easy to love some people who are very loveable. But then there are those who irritate, annoy, oppose, abuse, abandon or reject us. Jesus shows how to love all of them. He has called us to a lifelong mission in learning how to love others. It isn't feeling something but it is a decision as to how I will treat others regardless of how they treat me. I may not be able to change them but I can and will be in control of my actions.

Our old way or old nature/man was basically selfish. So being called to love, to give, to seek others' best interest rather than using them to just meet my needs is a huge change. And there are a lot of people to love: self, mate, kids, parents, relatives, siblings, friends, neighbors, associates, boss, employees, people on the street, strangers, enemies…..

There are a lot of teachings about loving others in the New Testament. Jesus calls us to a radical new love. He asks us to love others just like he has loved us.

What do the following verses teach you about loving others?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How are you going to SHOW others that you love them? How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1: Luke 6:27-33, *"…Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you….Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that….But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Verse 2: Colossians 3:12, "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another, and if any of you has a grievance against someone. forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Verse 3: Romans 13:8, 10, "*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law….Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore. love is the fulfillment of the law."*

Verse 3: I John 4:11, "*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

Verse 4: I John 3:16-18, "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person. Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."*

Verse 5: Matthew 18:22-35. This is a longer one. Look it up in your Bible and read it.

Study number Six from The Answer: *Learning to love is a process*
Love at first sight can happen in an instant. It can disappear rapidly too. The kind of unselfish love God calls us to is based on a decision to actively and intentionally do what is for the other's best interest regardless of what my feelings might be at any given

moment. Romantic love can rise and fall over night depending on how the other makes me feel at any given moment. The love God calls us to is dependent upon an ongoing, lifelong commitment to do what is best for the other whether I feel like doing it or not, whether I think they deserve it or not. I read a comment a while ago that shows one aspect of this, "If a man loves a woman's soul, he'll end up loving one woman, but if he just loves a woman's body or face, all the women in the world won't satisfy him." Benyamin Chavez.

Being loving to others and treating them right is actually based on my decisions to do so, and not on how others act and treat me.

Actually, all the love God calls us to is love at first sight. That means we have decided to treat all people right, proper and respectfully with the love of God from the first second we see them. It is not an emotional feeling but a predetermined mindset and decision.

God loved us because He is love. It is His nature. He did what was for our best interest even at a time when we had no interest in him or maybe knew of him but chose to reject him and go our own sinful way.

Romantic love is an emotional response usually based on "You make me feel so good." It is sort of automatic; I don't have to do anything to have it, feel it or develop it other than see the other person and be in their presence. It is based on the other's looks, personality, abilities or willingness to please and pleasure us. In many ways it is selfish. "You make me feel so good. I want you. I need you. I can't live without you."

God's love, the love he calls us to, is based on his first giving himself for our best interest even while we were sinners. If we accept that love, he then fills us with HIS love and asks us to love Him and others not based on their looks, behavior, how they can benefit me, or what they can give me in return. I seek to do whatever is for their best interest. That is love. It is a decision. It is an act of obedience. I am helped by the Holy Spirit. It goes way beyond my old human nature; I give as a result of my having been loved by God and my new Spirit Nature.

What do the following verses teach you about loving others?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How are you going to SHOW others that you love them? How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1: I Corinthians 13:4-8, "*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily*

angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Verse 2: Colossians 3:13, "*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Verse 3: Romans 12:9-10," *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."*

Verse 4: Romans 12:17-19. "*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath…."*

Verse 5: Romans 15:1,2,7, *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up…Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."*

Study Number Seven from The Answer: *Prayer is about relationship;*

Prayer is talking or communicating with God. Before I was a Christian, I normally talked to myself all day long; internally, not out loud. It was normally brain talk, self talk, or inner talk. "John, that was great." "John that was stupid." Or maybe, "Now what am I going to do?"

After I became a Christian, I realized one day that had just naturally changed. No one told me to do this. It just happened. Now all through the day I talked to God. I had a friend to talk to, share with, ask for help, thank for good things or cry with.

A simple guide to daily prayer is to use ACTSS as an outline for your private prayer time. It will work anything.

A – Adoration. Praise God for his greatness, his being our God.
C - Confession. Confess your sins to God. Thank him for his forgiveness.

T - Thanksgiving. Have a time of thanking God for all he does for you.

S – Supplication. Pray for your personal needs and the needs of others you know.

S - Shush up and listen. I heard a man share this one day. After ACTS we need to add another S which he said stands for we need to then "Shush Up and Listen!" Maybe God has something he wants to tell me! I thought that was good. Listen to your heart. Listen to the word as you read it.

What do the following verses teach you about prayer?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How can you make talking with God a bigger part of your life?

Verse 1: Romans 12:*12, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer".*

Verse 2: I Thessalonians 5:16-18, "*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus".*

Verse 3: James 1: 5-8, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."*

Verse 4: Ephesians 6:18-20, "*And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people".*

Verse 5: Romans 8:26, "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pay for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

Study Number eight from The Answer: *Bible reading is about relationship*

Some have said that the New Testament is like a collection of love letters sent to us from God. When one is in love with another and is separated from their loved one for a period of time and they get a letter or email from them, they will often read it over and over. And they will often respond back to them sharing their thoughts and feelings.

We learn most of what we can learn about God/Jesus and his love from reading his love letters to us which are the New Testament writings.

If a person learned that the one they loved just threw their letters in the trash, or deleted them or didn't even bother to read them, it would make them wonder. If it is a written letter it will have worn edges from our reading them over and over. It is like the person is there with us in thought; We feel closer to them.

What do the following verses teach you about the importance of reading the Bible to our relationship with Jesus and others? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. What can you do to make spending time reading God's love letter of Good News to you a bigger part of your life?

Verse 1: II Timothy 3:14-17, "*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Verse 2: Psalms 119:105, "*Your word is a lamp for my feet a light on my path."*

Verse 3: II Timothy 2:15, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth".*

Verse 4: James 1:22, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

Verse 5: I Timothy 6:3-5, "*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain."*

Study Number Nine from The Answer: You will experience *a new struggle in life by choosing Jesus*.

When we choose Jesus we make a huge life change. We get off the throne and put Jesus on the throne. Life is now "What do you want Jesus?" rather than "What do I want today?" Life is now lived to please my Savior. He lived to please me and meet my needs and he is still working to meet my needs.

Here is the problem. While I have intentionally made that mind or head decision, the old me is still there. The old me was selfish and self centered. So for the rest of my life the old me and the new surrendered me will be in conflict. Each will be calling me to live their way. The Bible talks about this. So don't be surprised by this new conflict. Before I came to Christ I didn't have this in my life. I just did what I wanted! No problem.

It is like marriage. Before marrying, a person pretty much does what they want and lives the way they want. But that had better change when they marry or it is not going to go well.

After making the commitment and exchanging the vows a person may have to deal with wanting to go back to the single way of living and or dealing with attractions to other people. Marrying doesn't automatically end other attractions. But the commitment we made on the wedding day is to an exclusive relationship which means if and when one is attracted to another, they must be ready to say no to pursuing that attraction, turn their back on it, and, if necessary, run or flee from it. If we don't live in serious consideration of our mate's needs and how to meet them, the relationship will suffer.

All this is a conflict of feelings based on having made a choice, having made a commitment to another. Get used to it. Stay close to Jesus. Flee other attractions.

What do the following verses teach you about dealing with the temptations to be unfaithful or put yourself back on the throne? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will practicing what is written here change your life?

Verse 1: Galatians 5:17, "*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other…"*

Verse 2: Romans 12:1,2, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.".*

Verse 3: Romans 7:23,25, "*But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me……Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Verse 4: II Timothy 2:22, "*Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.:"*

Verse 5: James 4;7, "*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you."*

Study Number Ten from The Answer: God desires to see his children grow up into healthy, loving, mature adults. What parent would be happy to see their children in their 30's acting babyish or childish? The New Testament uses different words or phrases to describe God's desires for his disciples in life: mature, perfected, whole, Christ-like, complete. We are called in the s criptures to examine ourselves to be sure we aren't stuck in immaturity. Jesus is our model of maturity and wholeness.

What do the following verses teach you about maturing and growing up in Jesus? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will practicing what is written here change your life?

Verse 1: Philippians 3:10,11, "*I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him*….

Verse 2: I Corinthians 10:33-11:1, "*For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."*

Verse 3: Ephesians 4:11-14a, "*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants…".*

Verse 4: Colossians 1:28, "*He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."*

Verse 5: Hebrews 5:12-14, "*In fact though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil*."

Extra resources; Go to www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

Look under FREE BOOKS. You will find a booklet for free there titled, "Adult Babies."

It is a great read on this subject.

Study Number Eleven from The Answer: *Someone else wants your love and devotion.*

You angered someone when you gave your life to Jesus. You angered them, irritated them, and now they are upset with you. They might attack you or assault you openly or they might be more subtle in their approach. They had you but they lost you. They are now going to act like a jilted, jealous lover. They will fight to win you back. Who is it?

In the Bible he is known as the great dragon. He was called that before he was called the devil or Satan. Look at Revelation 12. We have been warned about him. Prepare yourself for his crafty schemes to break up your relationship with Jesus. He wants you to surrender to him instead of Jesus. He will gladly take you back.

Be sure and read the free book "A Dragon Slayers Life" found at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

What do the following verses teach you about Satan?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will knowing this help you and what will you now need to do to not let this dragon mess up your relationship with Jesus?

Verse 1: Revelation 12:7-8, *"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*

Verse 2: II Corinthians 2:11, *"in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."*

Verse 3: II Corinthians 4:4, *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Verse 4: Ephesians 6:12, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

Verse 5: I Corinthians 16:13, *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."*

Extra resource: " ***A Dragon Slayers Life"*** Free at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

A preacher with 4 kids read through it with his family. He later told me "John, this book has become a second Bible for our family. It is such a powerful teaching tool for our kids and us adults."

Study Number Twelve from The Answer: *You have a spiritual family relationship*

As a follower of Jesus you have been born into a new family. You are no an only child. For a while you might be the baby in the family but God wants to see you grow and take an active part in this family. Hopefully sooner than later you will be a big brother or

sister helping out with many responsibilities that God has given the family for each other. In the New Testament that family is called the church. We often tend to think of church as a place or building. It is not. It is made up of all those who are in the family of God.

With time we will discover that there are some really special people in the family as well as some we will think are a bit weird. We will find some who are strong, mature, helpful and giving, and we will encounter some who are immature and still selfish and misguided in many things. God gives us a lot of guidance in the New Testament about how to love this family. It will be easy loving some and very, very difficult loving some others. But loving the family is not optional. Oh, we might find some who aren't lovable and will reject our love. Even then we will seek to be mature and not let them stop us from serving the rest of the family and loving them in our actions.

What do the following verses teach you about loving those in your new family? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. What do they say about how to work with and live with those in your new family, the church?

Verse 1: John 13:34,35, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Verse 2: Romans 15:*5, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Verse 3: Hebrews 10:24, "*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the day appearing."*

Verse 4: I Thessalonians 1:7-8, "Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."

Verse 5: Ephesians 4:31 ,32, "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you".*

Extra resource; Read Gene Rogers' free book titled Don't Walk Alone in the Light at web site www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

Study Number Thirteen from The Answer: How to love your blood/physical family
What do the following verses teach you about our sharing Jesus' love with those in your physical family? If you are single, this is prep for any possible future marriage. Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will doing so change your life?

For your information, "Submitting" is the same as loving; doing what is for the other's best interest; putting their best interest ahead of mine; a selfless action. Notice in the first verse here. Men are being told to submit too! Submitting is not having to obey another and participate in any sinful activity against your will.

Verse 1: Ehesians 5:21, *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.".*

Verse 2: Ephesians 5:22-24, "*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* (The word submit means the same as love. Do what is for their best interest. It doesn't mean become their slave.)

Verse 3: Ephesians 5:25-33, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleaning her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church…..in the same way men ought to love their wives as their own body.*

Verse 4: Ephesians 6:1-3, *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor you father and your mother' – which is the first commandment with a promise – so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth".*

Verse 5: Ephesians 6:4, "*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

Study Number Fourteen from The Answer: *We are given a huge assignment as those in a serious relationship with Jesus. This is not optional for Disciples of Jesus.*

As a person who has come into a relationship with Jesus, we receive so many wonderful blessings and promises from God. It is overwhelming. And we have seen that God calls us to love him and also to love others. Part of our loving others is to accept our role as one of God's ambassadors to go to those not yet in God's family and share with those who will listen to God's invitation to become part of his family. This is a job given to all Disciples of Jesus. It is not just for pastors. It is for men, women, young and old, all who

become followers of Jesus. We must prepare for this most important task to be most effective at it. This really isn't optional. Unfortunately there are many who are willing to take all that God gives them but are unwilling to go and let others know they can become sons or daughters of God.

It is rather selfish to take all he has given us but then be unwilling to go and help those we know and meet in life become aware of what God has done for them in his love and how they can become one of his disciples also.

What do the following verses teach you about our sharing Jesus with others? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1: Matthew 28:18-20, "*All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.*

Verse 2 : II Corinthians 5: 18-20, " *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.".*

Verse 3: I Corinthians 9:22-*23, " I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.".*

Verse 4: Romans 10:14,15, "*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.'"*

Verse 5: Matthew 9:37,38, "*Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"*

Book: Training Disciples who Can GO and Make New Disciples. It is free at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

Study Number Fifteen from The Answer: *Don't forget your future.*

What you see and experience every day of your life is not the total substance of life; there is more to come. We can become overwhelmed with the events of life at times. There are painful, evil things we experience in life. At times we wonder, "Is this all there is?" We can pass through times of discouragement, disappointment, division, disillusionment, disease, disaster, downfall, danger, difficulty, distress, destitution, drudgery, discomfort, depression, despondency or despair. We can get tired of working, marriage, parenting, financial stress, health issues, studies, friendships, politics, serving and any suffering. Just keeping on with life will be difficult at times. During those times we MUST remind ourselves that what we are experiencing at any given moment is not going to last forever, it is not God's plan for our eternity. Something better is awaiting us. We will be raised from the dead one day and we will be ushered into an eternity with Jesus our Lord, King, Savior and Friend.

What do the following verses teach you about your future with Jesus?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will these verses help you as you face tough times?

Verse 1: John 14:1,2 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*

Verse 2: Revelation 21:1,3,4, "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away….And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Verse 3: Matthew 28:20, " *And surely I am with you to the very end of the age".*

Verse 4: 2 Corinthians 7:1," *Therefore, since we have these promises dear friends let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit , perfecting holiness out of reverence for Christ."*

Verse 5. Revelation 2:10 "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown".*

Verse 6. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 " *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

Extra resource: I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

E. Stanley Jones was a missionary in India for 40 years and authored over 40 books.

In one book he told about a tour of a village in India he was taken on. As they walked along the main street of the village his guide pointed out a group of women sitting next to the street weaving rugs. The guide mentioned that it took them 6-8 months to make one rug. E.S. wrote that he felt pains of sadness and pity for the women. The rugs were ugly with no design or pattern. There were loose threads and knots everywhere. What a waste of their life making something so ugly.

As they walked further up the street a loud noise made him turn to look back. As he turned he happened to see the women and their rugs again. He was shocked. He had to go back. Arriving at their location he realized that earlier he had been looking at the back side of the rugs! Now he saw the front. They were amazingly detailed and beautiful. He was overwhelmed and asked how they could possibly make something so beautiful in only 6-8 months. He stood looking with his mouth hanging open.

I've often thought of a wonderful life application in this. At times from our perspective our life seems a bit ugly, seemingly lacking in design, full of knots and loose threads. We experience unexplainable and unexpected pains, disappointments, failures and seemingly meaningless events of life maybe mixed with a scattering of good things and it doesn't make sense. We wonder, we have doubts and we ask why, what's it all about?

Those are the moments when we need to be patient and trust God, the one who weaves the tapestry of our lives. What we see now is the back side of our tapestry. One day, when this life is finished, we are going to be able to look back on all that happened and we are going to see something amazing, a product of the Master Weaver who has been working behind the scenes. We are going to see the Front side of our tapestry, the finished product.

One day we are going to see what God was doing in those dark moments and how He used them to add to the value of the finished product of our life, and it will overwhelm us. Our mouths will fall open as we fully understand how great God is and how He was with us through all the years faithfully working in our life.

I think about all I've gone through in life, the joys, the victories, the struggles, the sins, the failures, the mistakes, the evil actions of others and the mysteries I never understood. I also think about the many blessings in my life: my loving wife, our dear daughters, our grandchildren, dear friends and the laughter and joy I have experienced with others. I think about my sense of peace and joy in knowing Jesus and realizing that He has forgiven me of my sins. Oh, the lists go on and on.

I am sure that one day my eyes will tear up in a momentary blindness as God shows me the final tapestry from my earthly life. "Why did I ever doubt?" I believe at that time I will fall to my knees and weep uncontrollably with joy, gratitude and amazement.

I'm sure that the design and colors will be so brilliant that they will make a rainbow appear pale in comparison.

What will the blend of colors be?

For me I'm sure there will be plenty of black representing my failures and my sins.

There will lots of red showing the blood of Christ by which those sins were forgiven.

There will be plenty of browns recalling the pain and suffering caused by the lies, betrayals, short sightedness, selfishness, inaction, disinterest, unfaithfulness, abandonment, neglect and indecision.

There will be grays from the dark days, illnesses, loses, injuries, unexplained suffering and hurts.

There will be green reflecting the good I have done.

There will be splashes of light blues reminding me of all the refreshing times from God in my life.

Yes, there will be yellows showing the many moments that the Son shown in my life.

There will be rich purples reflecting the majesty of my King.

Oh yes, there will be lots of GOLD indicating the many untold riches God lavished on me.

I can only imagine.

John's attempt to define the Love of God put into action in our lives

I think most of us would like to see and think of ourselves as being loving.

And I think most of us at times will over exaggerate the reality of our being all that loving. Proverbs 16:2 says, "All a person's ways seem pure to them." Yes, when we look in the mirror we might not like what we see on the outside but our tendency is to see ourselves as better than we might actually be on the inside.

God often calls us to examine ourselves to take a serious and honest look at ourselves. With Jesus we don't have to hide things. He knows what is going on. And he can help us mature and grow faster if and when we humble ourselves, confess our sins, weaknesses and confess our need for him and dependency on him.

I once read that often the longer one is a Christian the more honest and open about their weaknesses they become, because they understand God's mercy and grace better. They know they don't have to hide things from God but can openly come to him and confess those weaknesses and their need for him in their life every day and he will lovingly help them deal with it all.

I have to speak as a learner, as one still on the journey. I have failed often in my efforts to build loving relationships. And I have succeeded often. I wish I could say I was an expert on the subject but I'm not. I have a lot to learn yet; ah, well maybe I don't have so much to **learn** as I have a lot **to do** practicing it better. Know it I do; doing it as well as I could? Well, I have plenty of room for improvement.

I will have to adopt Paul's statements as my own: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ."* Philippians 3:12-14

I am still pressing ahead, trying to apply what I know.

Let me take a stab at trying to give a picture of the differences between our human kind of love and the kind of love relationship God commands us to live and share with others.

Human love tends to be selfish. Me First!

God says this about our heart. Jeremiah 17:9 **"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."** We have a heart problem. Most of the world's problems are caused by the kind of heart Jeremiah speaks of; deceitful, lying, unfaithful, selfish, justifying, hiding, denying, blaming, criticizing, and so on. It is no wonder the world is in a mess. That being the case it could be said we need a new heart.

Jesus said "For it is from within, out of a person's heart that evil thoughts come…..All these evils come from inside…" Mark 7:21,23

God promised to help us by giving us a new heart. *"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone…"* We don't need new laws, more education, more government programs, more jail, armies, police, lawyers, judges, etc. We need new hearts.

He did that in Jesus. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old is gone, the new is here."*

Part of making us NEW is that God forgives us, cleanses us, empties us and then fills us with himself and his kind of love.

And hope does not put us to shame, because ***God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,*** *who has been given to us."* Romans 5:5

Having done all this God now calls us to a life of love. He commands this of us. John 15:12 *"My command is this: love each other as I have loved you."* This would be impossible without him filling us with his love.

He calls us to live a life of love first to him as in 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul.' Then we are to love others as we love ourselves.

THERE IS ONE DANGER INVOLVED IN ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE

He expects us to change and to pass it on.

If we accept his love, forgiveness, cleansing, support, presence, and all the other promises but then don't pass all that on to others we run the risk of being an ungrateful son or daughter. This following parable addresses this.

It is sometimes called the parable of the Unmerciful Servant:

Matthew 18:21-35 Read it in you Bible.

Oh, those are hard words.

But they are logical.

If I accept God's forgiveness but don't' forgive others I am not obeying God.

He forgave me of the sins that put Jesus on the cross. But then if I turn around and won't forgive those who have sinned against me and instead I seek to punish and seek revenge against them God is not going to be happy.

Jesus forgave us.

Do we forgive our mate for their offenses, irritations and grievances?

And our kids, parents, friends, etc.

Oh, so we will TAKE ALL THE GOOD from God, but we won't pass it on?

How small, how ungrateful and how pathetic. The Holy Spirit has reminded me of this parable a number of times as a loving slap on the back end.

Love is a decision to be willing to make sacrifices for others to help meet their valid needs, to advance their best interest in the eyes of God. It is a decision to limit my own freedoms to help meet the needs of another. It is denying myself and what I always want in order to fulfill the life and heart needs of another. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves." Whoa. Are you starting to see it? Self denial is a means to put others first and be a blessing to them. That is exactly what Jesus did for us. And at times he suffered for it. But he did it willingly and in love. And that demonstration of love in his suffering became the force that opened the hearts of many who had even helped kill him. Many of them became his followers.

Love that doesn't have a sacrificial element to it will end up being based on emotions and selfishness. That is a human love.

Selfish love is focused on and thinking about the answer to this question; "**What have you done for me lately?"**

If you have been good to me, treated me good, given to me, given me what I want, made my happy, then I will be good to you.

You do things to make me feel good and I will treat you well.

I've heard it described as the "IF" condition. "If you are good to me, I will be good to you."

Jesus calls us to the 'regardless' condition. I choose to be loving, kind, respectful, helpful, polite, etc. "regardless" of how you treat me.

The IF condition: If you do things that irritate, annoy, hurt or anger me I will respond in the same ways maybe even attempting to make my response more irritating or painful to punish you and maybe even teach you a lesson.

It is basically trying to get others to change the way they treat you through upping the intensity of revenge treatment a level or two. Or maybe it is simply just to get even or punish them. That doesn't make relationships better. Forgiveness and self control do.

Love which decides how it will treat others based on how I 'feel about you' or how 'you make me feel (good or bad) will damage, weaken and with time destroy relationships.

"If you haven't been good to me; you will pay a price."

I will withdraw.

I will withhold.

I will pout, maybe scream, throw something, betray you, try and hurt you, gossip about you, or maybe just be cold to you or abandon you in order to let you know I didn't like what you did or didn't do for me. Maybe I'll just search for something or someone else to give me what I want.

There is a way to respond if others actions, attitudes, philosophy, habits, views on life, way of thinking or living don't agree with ours.

Being loving doesn't mean I have to approve of or like your attitudes, philosophy, habits, views on life, way of thinking or living or the way you treat me, but it does mean my response to you will be honest and respectful and certainly not with a revengeful, punitive or arrogant attitude.

Oh, it is WONDERFUL when love is reciprocal and that is the way it should be but it isn't always that way. A big question for each of us to ask about love, life and others is "Are they present in my life to please me in all they do and make me feel happy and loved?" Or do I have the perspective that I have the privilege of being present in their lives to be a blessing to them, to bring joy to their life? Most have an ongoing battle between these two view points in their inner being.

Godly love is focused on and thinking about the answer to this question: "**What have I done for you lately**? What do you need that I can provide?" (Help, support, kindness, respect, interest……)

Godly love is giving not knowing if what I give will be appreciated or returned but it is my nature to bless and encourage through my loving.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And oh how we try and prove him wrong. But we can't.

We are often raised from childhood where others are always 'giving to us'. Christmas, birthdays, holidays, rewards, etc. Oh, we love it too. But we need to be taught the joy and excitement of giving as we grow up.

So the Godly love asks, "What can I do for you today to help you or bless you?"

What can I say to you to bless you?

What can I give you to bless you today?

What can I say to others to bless them?

What can I give others today to bless them?

God, who can I love in your name today?

What can I do today to reach out to offer the Gospel.

How can I fulfill my role as an Ambassador today?

WHAT DOES GOD'S LOVE LOOK LIKE?

God, while we were yet sinners died for us

This is a major example of sacrificial love.

He did for us what we needed, even when we had turned our back on him, rejected his ways, thought we knew better, wanted to live 'free' doing what we wanted, when we wanted, how we wanted and all the time wanting to be free from any temporary or eternal consequences, or without any real concern on how it would affect God or others.

Godly love is sacrificial; while we were yet sinners.

He gave up more than we can comprehend by coming to earth, to be rejected, spit on, ridiculed, lied about, unjustly tried, beaten and then killed on a cross. He did this with HOPES that we would respond with appreciation, gratitude and love for him and desire an eternal relationship with him.

Godly love is selfless; he limited himself to show us his love and allow

us to have a good relationship with him.

Godly love provides us with what we need in life and eternity.

Godly love is a decision to bless.

Godly love is not a decision to support or approve someone's sinful life style but a decision to offer them the way, truth and life regardless of their life style. It is then their choice if they want it.

Godly love is not based on another's morals.

Godly love is offered freely but can't be forced on anyone.

Godly love is focused on providing or offering any legitimate need.

Godly love is 100%. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more than he already does.

Love leads to self control. Titus 1:8 Paul talks about the qualities of a Christian leader when he says, *"Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined."*

Self control is defined as; caution, care, order, refusal, humility, modesty, reason, abstinence, self denial, avoidance, abstaining, non-indulgence.

Godly love says I won't do anything that will harm another person;

Romans 13:10 "*Love does no harm to a neighbor."*

That includes your mate, kids, parents, relatives, friends, associates, neighbors, etc.

The opposite of self control is self indulgence, revelry, arrogance, impropriety, lawlessness, animalism, audacity, disorder, irresponsibility, gluttony, wildness.

Love leads to self-denial

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

It is not more blessed to receive than to give.

Selfishness says: If you give to me, I will love you (as long as you give to me).

Stop giving and I stop loving."

I've started a chart for you. This is another tool you can use for the rest of your life as you study how to love God and love others. Make your own blank chart and keep it near your Bible as you read it. See how many passages you find over the years showing how to love by God's standards.

What do people need? How do I show love? Here are a few examples.

As you read N.T. passages you can break them down as illustrated here for your own learning and growing in love.

There are RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS and RELATIONSHIP BREAKERS.

You can think about each word and how they either build or break a relationship.

Passage	What people need; how I show love to others. This IS showing love. RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS	What people don't need. These are not being loving. These are being selfish with no self control. RELATIONSHIP BREAKERS
Colossians 3:5-14	Compassion Kindness Humility Gentleness Patience Bear with each other Forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Put on love	Sexual immorality Impurity Lust Evil desires Greed which is idolatry Anger Rage Malice Slander Filthy language Liars
Ephesians 4:2-3	Be completely humble Gentle Patient Bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the peace.	

2 Timothy 3:25		People will be lovers of themselves Lovers of money Boastful Proud Abusive Disobedient to their parents Ungrateful Unholy Without love Unforgiving Slanderous Without self-control Brutal Not lovers of the good Treacherous Rash Conceited Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness but denying its power. (religious)
I Corinthians 13:4-7	Love is patient Love is kind Always protects Always trusts Always hopes Always perseveres Love never fails. Rejoices with truth	

Now, go and spend the rest of your life learning how to enjoy the love of God and in return, love Him and love others.