



# Absorbing God's Love To Release It

By Pastor Robert M. Reid

Relationships are often hard to maintain. A relationship that once was so vital and fulfilling can degenerate into a sour, painful conflict and cause one to wonder, "What made me think I could ever relate to that person?" As a result, relationships between people are severed resulting in broken marriages, family feuds, neighborhood bickering, workplace discord, or contention between church members.

Why is it that we sometimes find it so hard to do as Christ commanded—to "...love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12)?

Perhaps we rationalize that it's because the person is no longer lovable. If he were not so opinionated, cantankerous, accusatory, sinful, or judgmental, then I could love him! The problem with this assessment is that Christ challenged us not only to love the lovable, but to "...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43). Frankly, Jesus does not give us a lot of wiggle room when it comes to dispensing love!

Author Max Lucado observes how we often try to respond to the unlovely. "Our typical strategy is to try harder. Conventional wisdom says that a lack of love implies a lack of effort, so we dig deeper, strain more. We're going to love if it kills us! And it may do that." He suggests we may be missing a step in our loving process. He asks, "Could it be that the first step of love is not toward them [the unlovely] but toward Him? After all, you can't give what you don't have. You give love by first receiving it. 'We love, because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19)."

In a culture of doing, we must do a countercultural thing: We must become love receivers so that ultimately we can be love givers.

The Apostle John wrote a lot about love in his epistles. Before challenging his readers to love, however, he challenged them to soak in an appreciation of the love that God has for us (1 John 4:9-11). Then, after stressing that step of absorbing something of the greatness of God's love, he wrote, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Christians are often told to love others—neighbor, wife, kids—without being reminded of how much God loves them. Lucado offers an interesting parallel. A sponge is useless for wiping

off a counter until the sponge gets wet. He writes,

What I'm suggesting is that people come to us with crusty, brittle, hard hearts. And then for me to say, take that hard heart and go love somebody with that heart, that's impossible. It's just not going to happen. That's my primary job as a pastor – to help that person receive the moisture of God's love, to be immersed into God's grace and forgiveness. And then, that heart changes. It becomes pliable and moist and it really becomes a tool that God can use to love others.

Once we have personally absorbed the love that Christ has poured upon us, we begin to allow that love to flow from us, just as a sponge is squeezed and releases the water it absorbed. Lucado asks,

Long to be more loving? Begin by accepting your place as a dearly loved child of God. Want to learn how to forgive? Then consider how you've been forgiven. Finding it hard to put others first? Think of the way Christ put you first. Need more patience? Drink in the patience of God.

This kind of love is not natural; it is supernatural and is described in 1 Corinthians 13. It is a love that comes by means of a spiritual transfusion in which "...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Spirit produces the fruit of love in our lives (Galatians 5:22). We then are able to pour out upon the unlovely that love we have received, so that they can see the loveliness of Christ demonstrated in us.

What would happen if Christians took the time to focus upon and absorb the marvelous, manifest love of Christ (1 John 4:9)? Would more relationships be salvaged that are on the brink of damage or destruction? Would more marriages be healed? Would more saints stay in their churches to work through their problems and differences? Would more workers be impressed with the graciousness of a Christian coworker? Would more rebellious children be touched by the Christ-like love of their parents?

Absorb Christ's love for you—then let it splash upon those around you!