


Extravagant Love

Mike Connell

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Extravagant Love

[Keep Yourself in His Love](#) One of the most painful experiences in life is to go through experiences where you're unloved or where people react against you, where they speak against you or where there's physical or emotional violence, and you actually experience over a period of time a deep sense of lack of value, that I don't belong or I'm not valuable to anyone. You come to the conclusion in your heart that I'm unlovable.

[The Great Commandment \(1 of 6\)](#) Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? What's the most important thing in the Bible? And Jesus said to him - here it is - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul. He said this is the first and great commandment. Second's like it: love your neighbour as yourself. So notice there, love God passionately, love people fervently, including yourself

[God's Extravagant Love \(2 of 6\)](#) Christian life is a response to God's love, a continuing response. We love Him because He first loved us. Meetings aren't enough. I must meet with God. I must feel His presence, encounter His presence and I must learn how to respond. If you love Me, you'll trust that what I say will work out good for you, and you'll do it. Many Christians want to come into an experience someone else creates, rather than a lifestyle where they walk and enjoy God. The measure of your maturity, is not your experiences, it's what do you do with people

[Keep Yourself in the Love of God \(3 of 6\)](#) In Jude 20 it says keep yourself in the love of God. Now why do I have to guard or protect or watch over this area of encountering, experiencing, and walking in the love of God? There's an enemy that wants to keep me from it. The devil brings spiritual pressure around us. You've got to guard against isolation and loneliness.

[As You Love Yourself \(4 of 6\)](#) Now God's calling the church, calls every person, to serve. Love always serves others, but if you're not happy about who you are, you'll use the serving as a way of fulfilling an unmet need inside, so God wants us to place value on ourselves. So I want to focus on 'as you love yourself.' So what do you believe about yourself? When you look in the mirror and you look there, you look at that person there, what do you think?

[Loving Yourself \(5 of 6\)](#) Loving yourself is not the same as being self-centred, it's not about being selfish. It has to do with placing the appropriate value upon your life that God has placed. It's coming into agreement with Him, so our relationships with others are not affected by the way we see ourself. You are valuable, you are a special person, you are important to Him.

[Love your Neighbor \(6 of 6\)](#) Love is incredibly practical. We've looked at spiritual dimensions of it, the need to experience God, to hear his voice, that's the fuel for the fire, but encounters with God are always to lead us to mission. Love always has an outworking, or a practical expression. Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

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Keep Yourself in His Love

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One of the most painful experiences in life is to go through experiences where you're unloved or where people react against you, where they speak against you or where there's physical or emotional violence, and you actually experience over a period of time a deep sense of lack of value, that I don't belong or I'm not valuable to anyone. You come to the conclusion in your heart that I'm unlovable.



Keep Yourself in His Love

Now let me just start with a story about a person I met in Wellington some years ago. I was going down to speak at Promise Keepers, and I came out of the airport and waiting around, wondering who's going to pick me up, and this old drug rehabilitation van pulled up outside. So the transport was the drug rehabilitation van, and there was a fairly big Maori fellow there, with tattoos all over him, and he's sort of standing out there, and he said oh, this way bro'. I said okay, this must be the one. So I got in there with him, and anyway I

got talking to him, found out his name was Peter and I said Peter, tell me a bit about yourself.

So he began to share about his background, and he'd had a very hard background; abusive father and family, and it was a very, very difficult painful background. It was quite distressing to hear about it, and he got involved in the gangs, he was then dealing drugs. He was the drug dealer, he was the one - and even while he's in the prison, he's got the deals going through his wife in the home. Anyway I said well what happened to you?

He said well, someone must have been praying for us. He said I got in here, and he said, you know, he said I started to feel so depressed after a while, and you know it's a tough place, hard to live in a prison. He said I started to feel very, very depressed and down, and he said I had a cell on my own, and he said there was one night there and he said I was just at the very end of myself, so actually what I did was I just put up my hands and said God, if you are real, Jesus, if you are in - because he said what had happened was, he'd had one of the other prisoners give his heart to the Lord, as a result of a team coming into the prison, and he thought the guy was a wimp. He wanted to beat him up, and he really was reacting, and the guy would not react back to him.

So this night he just got in the prison cell. He said God, if you're real show yourself to me, and he said it was like a light went on in the prison, and he said he felt the love of God. He felt the person - he didn't see anything, but he said he felt as though someone was standing there in front of him. He knew exactly who it was, that it was Jesus, and he said he began to feel love flow into his heart like he had never experienced in his life. He said it came over him in waves. He said I could not stop. He said here I am, I'm tattooed all over, I'm a gang leader and everyone's scared of me, I'm a hit man, and he said there I am on my knees, just blubbing like a baby. I sobbed.

I said well what happened? He said I just cried and cried and cried and cried. He said he couldn't stop crying. He said I cried for ages. It was loud. Everyone heard it, and they all figured I was having a breakdown, so I just stayed there, and he said the presence of Jesus so touched me in that cell. When I felt His love, all I could do was respond to Him. He said I received Jesus into my heart, alone in the cell, because I encountered the love of God, and he said I then wondered how on earth I'm going to live in prison, you know. Now I love Jesus, what's going to happen? I won't be tough anymore, and I'm not going to beat anyone up. So he wondered how he'd get on with his wife.

Anyway, his wife come in to see him the next day, and he was just wondering how he could break the news to her, that what had happened to him in the cell. Then she spoke up; she said honey, there's something I've got to tell you. He said what? She said well you know you've been asking me to deal all these drugs while you've been in jail? She said I went to a church meeting, and I gave my heart to Jesus. My life has changed. I got rid of all the drugs - and she's sort of waiting for the punches to start flying, and instead of that, you know, they both wept together, that in a place where both of them were in prison, one in the prison, and in chains in his heart, the other outside the prison, and in chains in her life; Jesus met both of them, and they were touched with His love, and both were changed.

He said we've been working with the drug rehabilitation ever since, and I've been able to speak to people in schools. I've got a purpose for my life, and it started when I connected to the love of Jesus Christ. His life was transformed by that experience, and I want to talk to you, because that same Jesus who loved him, is here to love you as well.

I want to share with you a verse that'll just help you, and I want to just speak to you about just a couple of things out of this verse, and I want to give you a couple of practical keys, very, very simple practical keys and I want us to read if you've got a Bible with you, and read in Jude which is a one page book, just before the Book of Revelations, so it's not very hard to find, you know. Let's see if you can find it there and it says - this is what it says. It says in Verse 20, but you beloved - so it's talking then about people who are mocking, walking in ungodly lust, sensual people having divisions and whatever, He says but you, He said you - notice what it tells us here - He said building yourself up in your most Holy Faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking expectantly for the mercy of Jesus Christ. Keep yourself in the love of God.

One of the things that's one of the most painful experiences in life, is to go through experiences where you're unloved, or where people react against you, where they speak against you, or where you're in a home which is hostile, where there's violence, verbal violence, physical violence, emotional violence, and you actually experience over a period of time, a deep sense of lack of value, that I don't belong, or I'm not valuable to anyone. This is one of the most painful experiences.

You come to the conclusion in your heart that I'm unlovable. It becomes a very, very deep pain that people live with in life, and one of the ways people try and cope with the pain, is to find relationships that will minister to the emptiness in their heart. We see it today, a generation where families are broken down, there's no fathers, and there's a struggle among young men and young women to feel loved and of value. It's hard for a young person to feel of great value when their father has abandoned them or abused them. It's hard to feel of great value when you've been through painful experiences in life.

Now most people come to the conclusion I'm not much value, and so they go looking for something to fix it, looking for something. The most common place is in relationships. Let me tell you this young people; if you go into a relationship looking for someone to meet the need in your life to be loved, the relationship will fail. It can never succeed, because you're trying to draw something out of someone else to meet a need in your heart, that can never be met just through that relationship.

The Bible tells us God is love. We're made for a dynamic relationship and connection with Him. If you don't discover the love of God personally, and learn how to take hold of it day by day in your life, you will look for a substitute. The substitute could be a relationship. I've seen so many young girls ruin their lives, some boy drew them in telling them he loved them, and all he wanted to do was lust after them. This is not going to work, and what happens is the person's left even more sensing and believing they're unloved, unlovable, because of the shame they carry in their life.

Listen and we've prayed for - Lyn's prayed for many, I've prayed for many. Heaps and heaps of people that have just gone through these terrible experiences, and really the issue is something that only God can sort out in your life, only God can meet that need in your life. So people turn to drugs. Why are they looking for drugs? They're looking for a hit to feel good. Why do they want to feel good? Because something is missing in their heart. People turn to all kinds of things. Some of them turn into competitive sport, some turn into different kinds of work, some just get busy to try and bury the pain.

Listen, I remember praying for one man. He was in his 60s and he broke down - this is a businessman, a successful businessman - he broke down and wept and wept and wept. Even though he'd worked hard to succeed, nothing could stop the pain in his heart, that I'm actually unlovable. He thought that if he worked hard enough, he would be lovable. So God wants to help you with this, and in this verse I want to share with you, just some simple keys that'll help you just understand how to deal with this issue.

You can't find what you're looking for. There's no one out there will meet your need to be loved, and so here's the thing; you've got to actually establish that in your own heart. The Bible says that if we are rooted and grounded in the love of God, in Jesus Christ, then God fills us. Our life begins to have purpose and impact. Isn't it a very, very simple thing? Let me just talk to you then. I'm going to give you a couple of reasons why it is that people struggle so much, and this is something that many of you struggle with.

I know we've talked with, and counselled with, so many young people, so many broken relationships. I've watched people go from one relationship to another, and it's like the same thing keeps breaking down, breaking down, breaking down, because at the core of their being, they're not established in Christ, and in the love He has. And I want to help you in just a moment how to do that. One of the first things to see is why is there such a struggle? Why is it I struggle to feel love? Why is it I struggle in my heart to be lovable? Why do I have that struggle? Why is it that at times in the middle of a crowd - and I can remember it when I was a young person in university. I can remember being in a crowd in a party one night, and everyone's drinking, the music's all raging and pumping, and then right in the middle of that party - and I'm drinking. I probably had too much that night, and I'm right in the middle of the party.

Suddenly overwhelming loneliness and feeling unloved came into me, and I thought this is crazy! I'm in the middle of a whole group of people. What is this thing that seems to come against me? So let me explain to you what it is, and then how to deal with it very quickly, with some just simple keys to help you deal with it.

The first thing to realise is that you have a personal adversary, the devil, who wants to lay on you all his rejection, and all his resentment, and bitterness, because once the devil actually walked in the realms of God and experienced personally the love of God, but when he sinned he was totally, totally rejected, and if there's one thing is his mission in life it's this; it's to put on you his rejection, so you feel totally unloved, and begin to ruin your life trying to find a way to heal that need in your heart.

In John 8, I think Verse 44, it says that the devil is the father of lies, so if demonic spirits were attacking you which they do, they don't come and announce I'm attacking you. You don't have a spirit sort of just turn up and say well I think I'm going to pick a fight with you. It doesn't work like that - they operate invisibly, and so you live in a physical world with physical relationships, but you also live in a spirit world. In the spirit world, demonic spirits come to attack, so how does the spirit attack you? How would you know if something was attacking you? Very, very simply, when a spirit comes, it comes near. It draws near, just like I'm drawing near right now, and when it becomes near, it begins to fill your mind with certain kinds of thoughts, begins to fill your emotions, with certain kinds of feelings.

So when a spirit comes near, it will invade you with its thoughts, and its emotions, and you'll think they're mine. You won't discern necessarily that this comes from outside you. You'll think that's me - and so demonic spirits, they torment people, and Jesus made it very clear. The devil is the father of lies, so what he'll do is, he'll come near to you when something happens in your life, and he'll just sow a seed in your mind of thoughts and things, oh, that must mean I'm unlovable.

So when does he come to do that? Well he comes not all the time. He comes periodically, in waves, and I'll show you what to do with it, because I don't know anyone who hasn't experienced this. You'll have sudden times when this thing suddenly overwhelms you. You feel like all - no awareness that God is here. All you're aware of, is just the emotions and turmoil you've got inside. So when do these things come, when do they attack you? I'll give you some examples when they attack. They attack you when you sin and fail. They'll come immediately in to accuse you, condemn you and cause you to believe in your heart, you can't be loved.

When we sin sexually, that's the time they come the most strongest, and they push on you an accusation, and a condemnation, you're unlovable. There's nothing good about you. Look at what you have done. Demons come this way. That's how they work. They fill your mind when you've failed, when there's pain in life. Perhaps you have a disappointment, and a setback in life; suddenly there'll be this pressure come on you out of the spirit world. Your mind and emotions will begin to fill up, and you begin to think that you're a failure, or you may have a difficulty in a relationship - which is normal, because all relationships have difficulties - and then suddenly in the midst of that difficulty in the relationship, you'll have these overwhelming thoughts and feelings come into your mind; oh, I'm just not acceptable, unloved and this is not working out. I need to get out of here.

Or you'll have a situation come in your life where a disappointment has come, and suddenly your mind and heart become overwhelmed and invaded with thoughts, feelings, emotions.

That is a spirit pushing on you. It is the father of lies, and what he is doing is sowing into you right at that point, a lie that you are not of value, that you are not loved.

Now here's the deal. If you will accept that lie, if you will believe what he says, and put it in your heart at that moment, he has power to torment you, and keep you in torment. I've seen heaps of Christians - it's been just a heartbreak for me over years to watch so many Christians. God has given you access to His love, and His presence, and to be able to live in that presence, and to actually feel and experience that love day by day, yet most people don't. What they experience instead are all kinds of turmoil, and their emotions and soul feeling unloved, not of value.

Listen: you better get real on this. There is a fight for your life, and your destiny, and you've got to decide you'll stand up, and who you're going to believe. You've got to do the things that will position you to experience the love of God consistently, and to be able to recognise and overcome those things when they come against you. Listen, this is a number of ways that the devil comes I'll share - let me just show you how you can deal with it, very, very simple. It's not very, very hard. When he comes, it's always the same way, comes through the same avenues, and he comes, and you end up with the same thoughts.

Here's the core of the problem. In Proverbs 4:23 it says, guard your heart with all diligence, because whatever you believe in your heart, is going to flow out in the rest of your life, so what counts is what you believe in your heart. If you have a judgement in your heart, that formed when you were younger, I'm unlovable, I'm of no value, I have to work hard or I'll never make it; if you have judgements in your heart about yourself, those judgements will sit there, and demons will use them and continually torment them, until you break your agreement with those things.

You are of great value. You are loved. The Bible says nothing can separate you from the love of God and Jesus Christ, nothing, nothing. Failure, nothing! Jesus paid for all your failures. Disappointments, nothing! Nothing can keep you from the love of God. Nothing will cause God to change His mind about you. Nothing you do - well you don't understand, I've done this or I had an abortion, I had this. No, no, no. Nothing you can do, will change God's view of you! He is love. He loves you unconditionally. He wants you to be filled with that love. Don't listen to the lies of condemnation. Don't listen to the judgements in your heart. Learn to recognise the voice that comes from God, the voice that comes from demonic spirits pushing you down and depressing you, because the moment you start down the track of beginning to start to doubt that God loves you, to doubt the reality of His care for you, to doubt the reality of His watching over you - as soon as you go down that track, then depression and all kinds of things come around. Then you're looking for a way out of the pain.

Now listen, you don't have to live like that. You can live differently. We're called to live differently. We're called to live, and walk, and enjoy the love of God, and it tells us some simple keys in there how to do it. It all has to do with you believing. It tells us you beloved, you're different, so praying in Holy Ghost, praying in the spirit, praying in tongues is a great gift to energise, and make your spirit man come alive, so you are aware of the Holy Spirit, because when you're praying in tongues, the Bible tells us your spirit is praying, the Holy

Ghost is rising up inside you. The spirit of God is expressing through you, so every time I pray in tongues, I'm aware the spirit of God is with me, and if I pray in tongues, my spirit will start to arise above the conflicts of the soul.

So number one, you need to start to do some time with God, and these are the sorts of things you can do, very simply. You spend time praying in the spirit. Secondly, you begin to meditate on what God says about you. Imagine it, what it would feel like to have God with you, loving you, being near to you. I took some weeks imagining the reality of God with me, God near me, His friendship to me. I just took time to imagine it. I didn't feel anything except a bit stupid at first, and if I'd stopped when I felt stupid, I'd have never have come to where I have in life now. Someone had said a great thing to me. They said if you knew that by pushing against this problem and resolving it, your life would change, wouldn't it be worth it?

I've looked all over. I've ministered all over New Zealand, but one of the most common problems I find right through New Zealand is simply this: people struggle with rejection, and believing they're unlovable, and when they give way to those thoughts and emotions, they become depressed, lose connection with God, and then they just become religious. We've got to know and walk in the reality, I am loved by my Father. So how can it happen? Well I took time to meditate in it, so for probably three to four weeks, every day I'd rise up, pray in tongues, speak and declare those demons are defeated, and then meditate that God loves me, and His presence is with me, and I would meditate and meditate. I'd imagine standing there, and God is with me, all the love that I would feel. I began to meditate in those things. You know what? It took me about three to four weeks, and then one day, I suddenly experienced God's love in the most very powerful way. It started to flow over my life, through me. I broke down and wept and wept and I had an encounter and experience with God, so I've practised re-meditating on that regularly.

What happens is, you begin to establish in your life, a pattern of feeling the love of God in your life. You have to allow your imagination to go there, and allow yourself to imagine what would it feel like to be totally surrounded by the love of God, and to stay there until you've been to experience it. So that's a simple thing you could do.

Second thing I found I needed to do was this; I needed to break my agreement with the lie that I'm of no value, that I'm unlovable. If you hold that in your heart, it will continue to trouble you. You see, you're responsible for what's in your heart, even if it's a lie, and if you've got a lie in your heart, the devil will just use it to constantly torment you. He'll leave you alone for a while, and then something will go wrong and next thing you know you feel this weight and pressure around you, and your emotions and in your spirit. You've got to push it away, and see it for what it is, just a tormenting spirit.

And so number one, spend time with God establishing the truth that you're loved in your heart, through meditation, acknowledging Him, praying in tongues, but mostly through meditation and confession of the word of God. It does it. I can tell you now, I can absolutely guarantee it does it. I can go and take time alone, and then very quickly start to feel His love flowing to me. I couldn't do that one time. I can do it now, and second thing that we'll share is, deal with what's in your heart. If you've got resentment and bitterness, if you've got

judgements in your heart about yourself, then repent of them. Just break your agreement with them, and then every time one of those negative thoughts come, just see it for what it is. Something like this will happen, because I remember being in a situation, two young men at the door there and - I may have shared this with you before - and one of them had quite a deep root of rejection. He felt unloved, unloved by fathers, and unloved by men, and I happened to walk in very, very busy and I was just a bit preoccupied. They both said hi, how you doing Pastor? I didn't hear it because I was involved in something else.

One of them just shrugged it off, oh, I'll catch up with him later. The other one, this is what he thought; that Pastor doesn't like me, and so all through that, he'd turned out to the church service to worship God and enjoy God, and all he could do was experience torment the whole service, because he'd taken hold of a lie, and the lie now was tormenting him. See, you've got to make decisions what you let live in your head. Your head is the most valuable real estate you have. It is.

You go to Auckland. It costs you hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy property. Believe me, your head is very valuable property. You be careful what you allow to get in there. You let the lies get in there, it'll affect the way you think, the way you see God, the way you run your life, the way you run your relationships. You're better than that! You're better than that. God absolutely and unconditionally loves you. The Bible's very clear. Nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God and Jesus Christ. Nothing. My failures, not my failures. What if I really blow it? No if I really blow it. It makes no difference. What if I sin? That makes no difference. Oh, maybe the devil will piggyback on it and condemn me a bit, but it doesn't change God's view. He says I've dealt with all your sins. Why don't you believe me? Step up, get forgiven, and get on with being loved, get on with walking with me.

Listen, you've got to assert yourself to believe God. If you believe in those things that come around you, which reject you, they'll govern your life. Why not make a decision? How many know what I'm talking about? How many struggle with these kinds of things? There's so many people. Why don't you make a decision, I will never again receive into my mind and heart any thought that I'm unloved and of no value. I will not harbour such judgements against me, but I will hold the truth that I am totally loved by God. I'll spend time to meditate in that truth, and that truth, when I embrace it, will set me free.

It's not something that you just do it once, it's over and done with. It becomes a lifestyle, and there are times when things will be just really good and you'll have a breakthrough for a while, and then a pressure will come again, and you'll have to stand up and hold the truth of God's word in your life. I guarantee that almost certainly in this coming week, you'll have some experience where something goes wrong, and the moment something goes wrong, you have a setback or disappointment or someone hurts or says something about you, in that moment of time you'll have an emotion flood your soul. You just stop, and look at what it is, and ask what I really see, and what am I thinking about that? I reject the lie there's something wrong with me. I believe I am totally accepted in God's eyes, and I'm going to walk in that freedom. I will not be put down. I will not be devalued by life, but I believe God will use life circumstances to make me a great person. It's a choice.

The Great Commandment (1 of 6)

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Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? What's the most important thing in the Bible? And Jesus said to him - here it is - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul. He said this is the first and great commandment. Second's like it: love your neighbour as yourself. So notice there, love God passionately, love people fervently, including yourself

I want to just start another series, and I want to look at Extravagant Love. That's a good one, Extravagant Love - trying to think about what I could call this series, Extravagant Love. So we're going to do some messages just related to that, and I want us to start in this particular passage here, in Matthew, Chapter 22. Jesus asked a question, in Verse 36, Teacher, what's the great commandment in the law? What's the most important thing in the Bible? And Jesus said to him - here it is - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul. He said this is the first and great commandment. Second's like it: love your neighbour as yourself. So notice there, love God passionately, love people fervently including yourself and so we're going to look at this series on Extravagant Love but this particular time we want to look at the love that God has for us, because most people when they think about being Christian they think well, there's lots of things you have to do now, and lots of things you're not supposed to do now.

It seems like life's more complicated, but Jesus never came to make life complicated. He came to make it abundant and He came to make it abundant by introducing us to a relationship, a personal relationship with God. So you notice what He says here the whole of the Bible, everything is summed up in passionately loving God. Notice all your soul and all your mind and all your heart. That's not sort of an inexpressive thing, that is a passionate thing. I was watching an interview with that New Zealand group Flight of the Conchords. You know Flight of the Conchords? These Kiwi guys and they're just trying to [speaks in a monotone] talk like this you know. One of the guys says those guys talk funny and this is what they said. They said oh no, that's just a New Zealand accent. I laughed and laughed when I saw that, but what it was, they were just highlight the monotony and lack of expression and passion.

When you have a look a lot of people are like that, no passion, no passion! God is a passionate lover of people, and we're going to look and see that the whole key around us loving God passionately is first of all experiencing Him. You can't make something like that just happen. It can't be done unless God doesn't first ignite something in our life by touching us, so before we look about loving extravagantly, loving God, loving people, love ourselves, before we go down that track we want to focus today on just the passionate love that God has for us because people have all kinds of concepts of God. The way you see God, is how you will approach Him, so if you have wrong concepts of God, it will affect how you can connect to Him, so for example if you believe someone's angry at you, you're going to steer

clear of them. If you feel guilty that you've already failed someone, let them down, you probably won't want to meet Him.

If you feel that someone is really heavy and demanding of you, you won't enjoy being around them, but if you know someone loves you and celebrates you and welcomes you, accepts you no matter what's happened in your life, they're not fazed, they're not changed, they're not disturbed, that they can totally be relied on to embrace and celebrate you, you could easily connect with a person like that. The problem is we don't have many relationships like that, and so we project the pain of our own relationships into the relationship with God, and then avoid Him. I want to just show and open up the Bible and show you just the extremely expressive, passionate manner that God loves people. It's extraordinary and it's pictured all through the Bible, just how passionate God is, and so we're going to look at that. In 1 John 4, Verse 19 it says this. It says we love Him because He first touched us with His love. So this love that Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, love Him passionately, get into God. Really be engaged and love Him passionately, and then let it overflow to love people. He said, that is the response that comes when we experience something with Him, so the thing is not to try harder to love God and love people. The thing is firstly fuel the fire of your experience with Him. We love Him, because He first loved us. We respond to Him, because He first initiated reaching out to us. Now when you begin to see that, when your capacity to live the Christian life diminishes, take time to get near and experience the love God has for you. It will ignite the fire again. Get in His presence.

So let's look at this. First thing I want to look at is 1 John, Chapter 4 and Verse 16. God is an initiator of love. God is the initiator. Many people think about God as being someone who's very demanding. He wants us to do this and doesn't want us to do that, but this is what the Bible says. Now God is love, so it tells us the nature of God, He is a loving person. He can never change. That's His nature is to be loving, to be compassionate, to be gentle, to be merciful, to believe in us, to look for the very best in us, to be very patient in working with us. That's the very nature of love that's described in 1 Corinthians 13. That's what God's like. He's patient, He's very, very compassionate, He's willing to reach into us and encourage us and lift us up. He's willing to help us, and He longs to invest Himself. He's an initiator of love, He starts it off, and we'll show you just with a few things in the Bible, and as you think about your own experience, that God always is an initiator.

How many people just woke up one day and decided they're going to become a Christian? You don't. God has sent people into your life. He's pursued you. He's always the one who initiates. When you look through the Bible, we find from one end to the other, God is the one who initiates relationship. Why did He make people? I mean with all the mess that people have made, why did God create people? Very simply this. Love must find an expression. Love must have an overflow. Love must outwork in a practical, tangible, verbal, emotional and spiritual way - can't just say I love but it's real deep down. Sorry, that kind of love doesn't work, it's buried, it's dead. It's not active, vibrant love. That always overflows and has expression. If you bury your love, your relationships wither, so God has designed us for a relationship. He designed people for relationship with Him. He designed you and I to experience Him, not just to know about Him but to actually experience a touch of God from the realm of the spirit, touching us because we are spirit beings. That's what God is like.

Have a think about that. That's how we are; God has designed us to be a relational being, to be a spirit being.

Now here's the thing about God is, He loves you. We find that hard because we find that love for most of us has been an experience where we experience love when we did right, and we experienced something else when we didn't do right, so people's love for us most of our lives, has been conditional on our performance, so we tend to think that when we come to God that His love for us is also based around our performance, so people reduce Christianity - well you've got to do this and you're not allowed to do that. That is not what Jesus came to give us. God loves you exactly as you are. You may think well my nose is too big. Well He loves that, it's the way He made it. Don't give up on it, see? You may think well I don't like my ears, they stick out. Well God loves those ears of yours. He allowed you to be designed that way. You may think well I've got some faults and lacks in my life. Well don't worry, God is not fazed by that at all. He sees the potential in your life and what you can be, because He loves you.

You may think well you know, I've really messed stuff up in my life. Well don't worry, God has made a provision for you to overcome that, to learn from it, and to become a better person at the other side. God loves you in the morning when you wake up, God loves you and is watching over you. I'll show you it in the scripture in a moment. When you sleep at night God is still watching over you. He doesn't sleep. During the day, God is watching what you do. He wants to invade your world, and to invade the world of others around you, so when you look in the Bible how God came to people, He came in unusual ways; He came to Moses in a bush, came to the disciples in an upper room, came to people in all kinds of different ways and He still does. All kinds of different ways God is willing to reach into your world. If you will look and reach out for Him, you'll experience Him. Trouble is so often we just get so busy that we just forget.

I want you to have a look at a scripture here in Psalm 139, it's an amazing scripture. This is one that David wrote. I won't open it all up but I want to just draw your attention to just a couple of things in it about how God looks upon you. See, God is an initiator of love. We'll pick it up at Verse 13. You formed my inwards parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. Now what he's saying here is he's saying that - see, what happens in a mother's womb is the physical body is formed, a child begins to grow and develop. But what David is saying in here, is he's saying that I was actually a spirit being, and You have covered me with a physical body, so You were watching over me even while I was being formed in the womb. Notice what else it says. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret. Your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me. So David is saying this; he's saying that while I was still in the womb being formed, while I was experiencing things in my mother's womb, You were watching over me, and as I came forth, You wrote down in a book a destiny, a plan, something my life was called to accomplish, a purpose for my life. What an amazing thing.

In Jeremiah 29, Verse 11, it says I know the thoughts I have to you, thoughts of good, not evil. So every day God is thinking about you. He's thinking thoughts that'll give you hope. He's thinking how your life can go forward. He's thinking how you can prosper. He's thinking how you can be encouraged. He's thinking how you can succeed. The Bible says the Lord

delights and takes pleasure when we succeed and prosper. He loves it. He doesn't sort of rejoice over us failing and falling over, He lifts us up. The steps of the good man are ordered by the Lord, though he fall, he'll not be utterly cast down or abandoned by God. God will lift him up and get him going again. This is the nature of God. He initiates love, He initiates reaching out, He continually thinks so God's absolutely passionate about people.

I want you to go with me in Song of Solomon. There's a whole number of ways in the Bible where God seeks to express what He's like, so if you just read it as a book you kind of miss it really, but if you realise that this book describes the experiences of men who encountered God; they weren't perfect people. The Bible's full of people with lives that were full of holes and mistakes and failures, yet God loved them and worked powerfully through them. Many of them changed their generation, yet they were full of holes and faults in their lives, but God loved them. He's not overwhelmed by your failures and lacks. He'll help you get up. I want you to have a look in Song of Solomon here, and it tells us about the love that God has. Now Song of Solomon, guys don't tend to like this book too much, and it kind of looks like sort of a romancey sort of book - well it is, and what it is, it's actually like an allegory. It's like a picture, a story of a relationship between a groom and the bride, so all through the groom talks, the bride talks, and so that's what it is. It's all full of that and it's full of talk of romance and love using picture language, but actually it is to describe the nature of what God's feelings and desires and yearnings are for people, particularly for those who have responded to Him.

Look what it says here in Song of Solomon, Chapter 8, Verse 7. It says many waters cannot quench love - so waters in the Bible speak of adversity or difficulties or setbacks, and notice what it says. It's God's love for you, you can't quench it. You can't put it out. You can't take the flame out, you can't diminish it in any kind of way. His love remains consistent. It's not dependent on our performance, so what happens is we tend to respond based on our performance, and the Bible says no matter what we're going through, no matter what difficulties, hardships, whatever struggles, failures, God's love for you doesn't change - unquenchable. He loved you at the start, He loves you now, He'll continue to love you - hard for us to understand it, so we're going to look at just a few more expressions of it. The Bible's full of it. Once you start to look for it you'll find throughout the Bible God trying to show how He loves people, and His willingness to engage in our lives in a positive, life-changing way - if we will respond. He's yearning for us to respond.

Let's have a look at another one in Song of Solomon - Chapter 4. Now this one here, this is going to be tough for the guys, but here it is. This is a man talking you see. Now guys, we kind of keep the love down deep, but it's not good enough you see? God is a passionate lover, He's a passionate person, so when God loves, He loves passionately. He's absolutely extravagant in all He does, so you think about creation for example, and you look in creation, and you look at just get on a clear starry night and just look at the magnificence of everything there. See, God is so creative. Have a look into creation, the whole variety of animals, they're still discovering species. In spite of all the species there is God's - you know, if you and I were told to make a few animals for the earth we'd probably come up with about three or four or five and that's about it - a couple that fly, a couple that go in the water and a few on the land we could eat, and there it is. But God is extravagant! Look at all

the animals, all the different kinds of species, the variety. Look at the big ones, look at the little ones, it's absolutely diverse. That's God - extravagant.

Look at the colours. If you had to think about the colours, if you were going to create a world and put colours you'd probably pick one or two of your favourites and that'd be it. Well God's got favourites - blue I think, then green - but there's all kinds of colours. God is diverse. You think about - look at the people around, how diverse we are. See, God is extravagant in His expression, so don't try and copy someone else. God doesn't want you copying someone, He made you like you are, He likes you like you are too. He likes you like you are. He likes you. He loves you. You are special to Him, you are valuable to Him. The world around you takes away your value, but God always values you. He never changes. Now look at this, now this is the groom speaking, and so these words here are a picture of God speaking words to people, to His people that have responded to Him. You have ravished my heart my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes. How fair is your love, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love. Now that's pretty - that's good stuff, we won't go any further, you'll just get all distracted. But see?

Now notice that word ravish. It means to fill with strong passionate feelings and emotions, because something is very attractive. In that verse it's saying, when people look to God with love and desire for Him, His heart is filled with expressive emotions. He loves that. He designed us for that. He designed us for an intimate expressive relationship, you're wired for it. You'll malfunction if you don't have it. The Bible says you all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory; sin's just we're separated from God and we can't function like we're supposed to. We still function in some ways, but not in the fullness of what God has. Look at that one there. I'll give you another verse here, try in Songs 6 and Verse 4. O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah - that was one of the most beautiful fruitful cities everyone wanted to go and live in, in Ephraim. You are beautiful. Now that's God speaking. Can you imagine God saying that to you? You are beautiful. You see you're struggling with that already, but that's what the Bible says. You see, you're struggling because you've got your own ideas about God.

God is not unwilling to say to you in My eyes, you are beautiful, and I love you. When you respond to Me, My heart is stirred with deep emotion. See, that's what God is like. He's not wanting us to keep laws and keep rules and stuff like that. He's wanting us to have a relationship. His heart yearns for the relationship and you see He gave us a free will so we can choose whether you'll enter into that relationship and become a lover of God, or whether we become a lover of the world, and fill our life with substitutes. But when we turn our heart towards God and begin to respond to His love, then He in turn begins to find fulfilment. He says He's made us for His pleasure, made us to enjoy us, and us to enjoy Him. That's the way we're designed. Wonderful isn't it aye? The guys are starting to choke now so - but you see, you know we carry wrong concepts of God, and most people bring out of their family background and their experiences, all kinds of ways of viewing relationships and love, and particularly God. If you don't actually find what the Bible says, you'll have an image of God that's not correct, that's not right and you can't relate to something that's not really Him. You've got to relate to Him, and He says you're beautiful, I love you. I'll give anything - and He has. He's given His only son, Jesus Christ.

So all the Bible you find God pursuing people, pursuing them, chasing them, trying to bring them into relationship, overcoming all kinds of things. We've got a whole number of things like that, so God pursues us. Think about in Genesis, Chapter 3 and Verse 9. Now God has made Adam and Eve for relationship with Him. Imagine every day God would come, and they would feel His presence, and He would talk with them, and they'd talk what they had done and would enjoy Him. Now things were beautiful and they made a dumb decision, they're going to go their own way, and so when God came again into the Garden, it says they heard His voice and felt His presence, and they ran away in fear and hid. Now what did God do? Well watch this - lightning bolts are for you! See, but that's the concept people have. It's a wrong concept. It's a religious concept, it's a false concept. Does God deal with issues? Yes, He does, but love always rejoices over judgement. God must uphold justice and judgement, but love is much higher than that, and so what did God do?

He said Adam, where are you? That's a relationship question. Adam, I know what you have done, and you have broken my heart, that you choose something as a substitute for Me. Can we meet and talk about this, and put this matter right? That's what God was doing. That's the response of someone who still loves, and Adam, instead of owning up and facing up, blamed someone else, and then because he made the choice not to own up and not to go back into relationship, he had to face then the consequences of that, and hence sin entered the world, and all the issues we've had since then. Eve did exactly the same thing, but that didn't stop God providing them with clothing and still being good to them. He still loved them. He still talked with them. You see we don't understand the passionate love that God has, and the depths to which He'll reach out over and over and over again to find ways to enter into our life and help us, see? You find it all through the Bible. Luke, Chapter 19 and Verse 10 it says this; the Son of Man came to seek, and to save that which was lost. So all through the Bible you find God reaching out to help people, to touch people's lives, to make Himself known in every kind of way, and then finally He came out of heaven and the person of Jesus Christ, entered the world to show what He is like.

Jesus said this is why I have come. This is why I left heaven. This is why I left the majesty and the glory of heaven and became very humble and came just like everyone else. This is why I did it; because I have come to seek, to pursue, and to get back something that's very precious and valuable. That's why I came. So all through the Bible God visited the earth, and kept showing His compassion and His power and His willingness to help people, then finally He sent His only Son. If I send My Son they will respond! Instead men crucified Him - even that didn't stop God loving. See? God doesn't stop loving. That's the thing that's amazing. You look at Paul on the road to Damascus and Paul, he's a religious nutter - too much education for his own good, so he's full of education, full of religion. He thinks he's doing God a favour killing the Christians, and so you'd think - now you imagine you're a Christian, and this guy's stirring up all of the problems and causing everyone to go to jail and be beaten up and people killed and families broken up, homes broken into. What would you be praying about that guy? Well probably different to how God turned it.

God just suddenly BOOF! and He interrupted him. He just interrupted him and then changed his life with one encounter, and that guy that caused so much destruction, God raised him up and made him the greatest builder of the church in the New Testament. That's God, passionate pursuer of people. He chases people. He looks for people. You think about how

you came to Christ. Someone came to you, and probably not one, probably several people, probably people would - God put it on their heart to pray for you, and all the time they were praying for you you're saying no to God, no, no, no. He's not upset by that. He keeps pursuing. We give up quick - oh well, there you are, that's their choice. That's harshness. God's not like that. He never treated you that way. His love is passionate, expressive and it pursues people. I've observed when people fall away from God, they feel condemned, they don't feel good enough. They do what Adam did, run away and hide. Where do you hide? Well you stay out of church, because if you come here you'll feel exposed. People run away from God.

I remember going to a pub one time. We'd gone out for a meal and we had a lovely meal, it was a wonderful meal and I enjoyed it. Then I heard the sound of all the music next door, and I thought let's go in there. I said there's bound to be some people who've fallen away from God in there. What are you going to do when you fall away from God, no more music? No, we're going to find some other music, go out there to the other music. No more Holy Ghost love to touch our life. We'll go out and drink something or whatever. So we went in there and sure enough I see a guy there and he was once walking with God. I said you watch this, and I went over and he was up at the bar there, he was ordering these drinks, had his whole hand with drinks. I just waited until he got his drinks, he was doing something busy, so I didn't interrupt him.

Then when he got all his drinks I tapped him on the shoulder and said hi, how are you doing? He sort of - holding all this armful of drinks and stuff [laughs] and he said what are you doing here? I said I've come to talk to you. [Laughter] God sent me to talk with you. He loves you, knows you've been through some hard stuff, but that doesn't stop God loving you. All you're doing is hurting yourself, finding substitutes for the real. You need another round, of course you will, see? Because you've lost what you needed, the touch of God, the presence of God, the love of God living and alive in your heart. Man, it was great we saw him at church that Sunday, it was good. I got so excited I thought I might go around all the other pubs so we did, we did a pub crawl, went in all the other pubs. Would you believe it, in every pub we found someone. Went up to them too, the same way, it was great, I loved it. I haven't done a pub crawl for a while - must get out and do it again. Should take Lynney with me. You'd be safe to take would you Lynney? [Laughter] Would she Leon? [Laughs]

Anyway, but you see the point is here that God pursues people, doesn't quit on them, doesn't give up, never gives up. He keeps believing in them, reaching out and He'll find someone to come and get you, just when you're - I can remember when I was in Dannevirke and started my first year teaching. It was disastrous. I remember coming home, it was so disastrous one day I came home, and I just sat down and cried, this was disastrous. I had the worst day, it was just terrible, and I thought my life was finished about that time, my career was finished. So I said that's it God, I'm getting out of here unless you send someone to help me! Now I had hardly finished saying the prayer, and knock, knock, knock at the door. I thought who the heck could that be interrupting me, feeling sorry for myself? I opened up the door, it was a Pastor was there. I said oh [Laughs] He said I felt God put it on my heart to come and talk with you. God pursues us, loves us, doesn't ever give up and He wants us to be the same kind of people you see? He's wonderful, a wonderful person.

Notice this in Romans 5, Verse 8, it says now God demonstrates His love for us, that when we were dead, had no interest in God, in fact anti-God, then He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins. Now you can't get better than that. That is passionate, determined, pursuing of people. God was determined to make it possible for us to get a relationship back, no matter how we treated Him. That's amazing love, amazing, extravagant that He would give His own Son to die on the cross, that we could have a relationship. Wow, that's amazing. See, so that's God see? Now a human heart can never be filled without God. In Proverbs 20, Verse 27 it says now the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord. That word lamp is like a candle, lamp that has to have oil in it, and has a little wick and it has a life, and it says you and I are spirit beings, so we're a spirit being. God is a spirit, we're made in His image, we're a spirit being living in a body. We have a soul, mind, will and emotions and whatever, but our spirit, until we receive Jesus Christ our spirit is dead.

The Bible says, like a person taking a light and bringing it down and lighting an oil lamp that was not working, he said that's what God does to our spirit. When we receive Christ we receive the love of God into our heart, it ignites something inside us. Isn't that wonderful? God ignites love inside you, then it's your job to keep it going. In the Old Testament God shows it everywhere in the Bible. Here's one example they had in the Old Testament. God said make an altar for Me. He says I want you to prepare an offering for Me, and give something to Me, then fire came from heaven. He said now you just keep the fire going, keep that fire of love burning, see? So God loves us, and there's a part of us can never be satisfying unless God satisfies us, so it says in another one of the Proverbs, it says in Proverbs 18:28, you will light and ignite, and set me on fire. How do we do that? When we receive Jesus Christ, when we experience God's love, we start to ignite on the inside. Now God has designed you with a number of thirsts or longings inside. It's interesting, everyone's got them, doesn't matter where they are, what colour, what race, we're designed with these needs.

One of them, there's a thirst in our heart for security. Every person longs to feel security. It's built into us, it's a longing see and we're longing to be loved unconditionally, not to have to work and never be sure whether we're acceptable, receive love that's unconditional and acceptance no matter what we've done, we're secure in that relationship. We need that. People enter into relationships hoping they'll find security, but if we don't find it in God, what we'll do is we'll find a substitute, so people enter into all kinds of relationships looking for security and then hurt themselves, because they need to find it in God. The second need we have, is the need for self-worth, to feel we're a person of value, so we try to find it apart from God; well we'll get lots of money, we'll try and become important people or get significant positions and whatever. But at the end of the day, none of those things satisfy. The money goes at the wrong time when you need it the most, the position fails and falls over and you get fired and something changes. There's no security in it. There's nothing lasting in it, but God never changes. He will always tell you how much He values you.

You look back at the cross, you see His value expressed in a very tangible, practical way - but right now we can experience Him. You can have that. There's another need we have, it's the need for significance, the need to have a sense of purpose in our life. There's a need to think that my life is not nothing but it counts for something, and God is the only one that can give you that, so if we don't find it in God we'll find it somewhere else, in thirst for adventure, in

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