

**Part III. New Attitudes  
about Prayer**

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## *God's kind of love*

That we do not love one another, or even ourselves, is the major tragedy of the human race. Contradictory as it may seem, deep within us we want love more than anything in the world; yet divorce rates increase, lonely people continue to live alone, and within the average family hearts break for lack of knowing how to give true expressions of love.

Ever since I can remember [writes L.K.], I've wanted my mother to put her arms around me and love me. But when I got within hearing distance of her, she'd be complaining or ill—she was very dramatic at either. Anyway, I never received the love I longed for, so consoled myself by thinking any show of affection was “puppy love” yet all the time starving for real love. The resentment within me began to express itself in withdrawal, the very opposite of what I wanted.

I grew up with the image of receiving the deep true love of a good man. When I married I knew it was a mistake, and it was. We're divorced. Now here I am

at 47, with that same deep longing within (like a rat gnawing away on wood) for a good husband, companion, friend or loved one. It isn't that I haven't met attractive men, but I can't seem to show how I feel. All my life I have pretended and played a part.

Many might have written this same letter. Everywhere people long to be loved, to recapture lost love, or to find new love. The longing persists, despite the unfortunate but familiar spectres of jealousy, hurt feelings, indifference, estrangement, separation, or divorce. The search continues—always with the hope of finding the “one right person” who will satisfy the love-hunger within our hearts.

We look for love from our parents, we hope for it from our companions, we long for it from our spouses. We are past masters at demanding and possessing. Yet how limited we are in giving—especially in giving of ourselves and our love. Not knowing how to give love, we are unable to accept love, and how empty is the deepness of that inner well within us.

Jesus understood this quality of the human heart, this ever-present longing for love. He understood the lonely woman of Samaria whose search was leading her in the wrong direction. Five husbands had not satisfied the deep longing in her heart. To her, He said . . .

Everyone who drinks this water [from the well] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. For my gift will become a spring in the man himself, welling up into eternal life.

John 4:13, 14; Phillips

The well water of human love never quenches—  
one is always thirsty with a thirst never really sat-

ished. The water which Jesus gives promises to quench the thirst of the one who drinks, becoming with him an artesian well, springing up now and forever with God's love.

God *is* love and God *has* love.

Those who are beginners in receiving love grasp only at the latter; God has love. This implies that God's love is a gift, which indeed it is, given generously and unceasingly to us. But there is more, much more, for the one who gives to God an open mind and a receptive heart. There is the gift of knowing and understanding that God *is* love, of knowing God is within us, knowing Christ is within us, knowing we have within us the Source of Love, the Power of Love. We only need to send "flash-thoughts" of recognition to make Love and Power available to us—for God is love.

"How does God's love operate?" asked a man at the close of a workshop, "Can the ashes of a dead love be revived?"

C. S. Lewis in his writings on love states that most human love fades to dry dust before those involved will give God an opportunity to come up with a new living shoot—which is God's kind of love.

"I still have a very poor understanding of the behavior and attitudes of Christians," wrote a woman who has suffered much at the hands of well-intentioned believers—suffered because she was a nonconformist.

As Christians we ought to be able to forgive and to love people despite the wrong, odd, strange, eccentric or stupid things they may do. That we are unable for the most part to do so is evident everywhere—not only in personal lives but in the serious situations facing our world today. Christian or non-Christian, black or white, we tend not to love those different

from ourselves, or those who do not agree with us. We shut them out and go our own way.

There are aspects of human love we need to recognize before we can either talk about or understand God's love. These involve our ability or inability to give and receive love—to accept or reject love. They distinguish human love from God's love.

Reuel L. Howe, in his book *Herein Is Love* (Judson Press, 1961, pp. 33-34), states the problem of human love very clearly.

Human love can be ambiguous; we do not know whether it is safe to give and to accept love. It is a risk both to love and to accept love, and all of us to some degree are afraid to take the risk.

Human fellowship is both heroic and tragic; it is both renewing and destructive; it is both healing and hurtful, but it is indispensable to life. This is our human predicament.

Something is needed to cut into the ambiguity of human love. This is what Christ does. He draws the confused currents of human love into the unifying stream of Divine love, thus making possible a new relationship.

In his analysis of our inability to love one another Mr. Howe gives us four suggestions for drawing human love "into the unifying stream of Divine love."

1. That we accept "dying" to ourselves and our point of view as a part of living. Jesus said (Mark 8:35), "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake . . . the same shall save it." If we die to ourselves we will not be surprised nor shocked by the violations of ideal behavior in human relations.

2. That we face, accept, see through and behind the wrong things people do.

3. That because Christ on the cross accepted the unacceptable in all men, we are able to accept the unacceptable in ourselves.

4. That God's Spirit seeks to incarnate Himself in us today, in all our decisions, actions, and relationships. "Communication," states Mr. Howe, "is contained in the giving of oneself to another."

The question is, since communication seems to fail before it ever gets started, how are we going to carry out this Divine-love level of communication?

#### **The key to communication**

What is the real key to love and communication? How do we find it? Seldom do we receive lucid help or clear guide lines. During the past several years, I've read many books on communication. Nevertheless I still encounter situations where failure to communicate my real intent resulted in inadvertently hurting others.

I sincerely believe there is but one answer. The answer is prayer, the kind of prayer Jesus taught as recorded in Matthew 18:19, 20 (Phillips):

If two of you on earth agree in asking for anything it will be granted to you by my Heavenly Father. For wherever two or three people come together in my name, I am there, right among them!

I believe, teach, and have seen demonstrated that Divine love is most effectively communicated through prayer, especially conversational prayer. Because dialogue praying involves all who are present, all should be, at any time, ready to participate. This creates an interest which makes such concentration a pleasure. The result is a spontaneous "agreeing as we ask" for things we had heretofore

not even thought of,—an agreeing that makes possible the “granting” cited in the above Scripture.

In the traditional monologue prayer, one person often prays his way around the world while others present sit back and (well, what did *you* do?) wait for him to return!

Conversational prayer affords an opportunity to communicate with Divine love, because Jesus (who is the personification of his love) said, “wherever two or three people come together in my name, *I am there*, right among them!”

Conversational prayer permits an honest revealing of one’s self without using clichés to mask our thoughts. It starts with surface needs, and proceeds to depth needs at the pace of those present. It is participating in one another’s prayers at the very point of need, as Jesus would do in person, without introducing half a dozen irrelevant ideas. In the last three chapters we will examine in more detail how this may be done.

Only Divine love entering into and reinforcing human love will give us courage to open our hearts and to ask for what we need. Jesus encouraged us to ask and to receive. He knew that in the act of prayer our hearts are more receptive and our motives more clear, than at any other time.

Only in the presence of Jesus is it possible for Him to make known the love, the help, the joy, and the peace of mind and heart He intends for us. Without Him, we mistrust each other and doubt ourselves.

The 15th chapter of the gospel of John is a classic description of the life of believers together, living together, loving one another, asking and receiving with joy. There is a different atmosphere when together we acknowledge Jesus is right among us. And He is always among us—we need only to turn our minds to

Him to experience His presence. There is no mask that can hide our face from Him or His face from us. All He requires of us is that we become as little children, trusting and being no longer afraid to assume the responsibilities of loving one another because we know we are loved.

### **How love operates**

Although we may not be conscious of any specific personal need of our own when we pray together, another present may out of timidity or fearfulness be concealing one. Here it is well to be still—be quiet and wait for a moment—until the Divine love present (Christ with and within all of us) enables the need to be brought into the open and healed.

At a recent conference we experienced this very thing. Eight people met daily to talk and pray about the small groups they were to lead following each message. After the second session, the need was suddenly revealed. Here is how it happened. I had asked them to stand in a circle, holding hands for a few moments while we prayed. I have discovered that a change in position brings freshness to our requests as well as to our bodies.

As we stood there, all taking part quietly, a professional woman of some renown, suddenly spoke to a retired missionary. "I can't stand in this circle holding your hand without asking your forgiveness. Nor can I any longer conceal our violent disagreement." There was mutual admission, forgiveness and God's healing love.

"As long as I didn't have to take her hand in prayer I could hide my hostility toward her," said the first woman, "but with the love active in this circle, I could no longer pretend. I had to let go—and let love take over."

When people pray aloud together, love is given and received, and there is the power of Divine love to heal. For Jesus Christ is love and He is healing. All healing love centers in and radiates from Him, and is directed to us whom He loves.

*This is what Christ does. He draws the confused currents of human love into the unifying stream of Divine love.*

Where Christ is present, in, among, and with His children there is healing love and healing power present.



**Jesus:** If you knew what God can give, and if you knew who it is that said to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water!

**The woman:** Sir, give me this water, so that I may stop being thirsty. . . .

**Jesus:** Drink this water I give, and you will never again be thirsty, for my gift will become a spring within your very self, continually refreshing and constantly fulfilling you—now and through eternity.

(John 4:10, 14, 15; based on Phillips)

