

# Why Men Can't Love

## INTRODUCTION

“He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.” (Proverbs 21:21)

This book is primarily targeted to the male population. It is written about men, to men and for men. My desire and hope is to see men love their wives, children and others to the extent that nothing, other than a relationship to Christ, will have more of a positive impact on their lives and the lives of those they touch.

Though the purpose of this book is to help men to love, it may also be helpful to women for the following reasons: (1) to gain more understanding of men and why they act the way they do; (2) to get a healthy picture of a man's role in marriage and family; (3) to increase your own ability to love; (4) to motivate you in your own spiritual and emotional growth.

There is no one person on earth who has more power than a father or a husband to influence the lives of his wife and children. God has given you that power, no matter who you are. When it comes to how you will use that power, you basically have three choices: (1) you can choose to take that power and create the kind of marriage and family God wants you to have; (2) you can use your power destructively and destroy those closest to you; (3) you can just let your power remain inactive, thereby also damaging your wife and children. Hopefully, this book will give you valuable tools so you can learn to use your power in the most constructive ways.

Unfortunately, the people who come to me for counseling are often the ones who have been hurt by fathers or husbands – men who did not use their power in constructive ways, but destructive. It seems that men have the power even more so than women to make their marriages and families work better. They also have the most power to destroy those closest to them.

This principle is supported in Exodus 20:56, “For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” That sounds pretty bad, but unfortunately it is true. Children are punished for the sins of their fathers. There's no doubt about it. Children are not punished by God for the sins of their fathers, but children are punished and suffer because of the sins a father commits.

A father and/or husband cannot commit sin without it affecting the lives of his family. The more severe the sin the more he punishes his own family. The main sin that husbands/fathers commit is the sin of not loving. Families always suffer if the husband and/or father doesn't love, as God intended him to do. However, there is some good news. God will show love to a thousand

generations, of those who love Him and keep His commandments. It appears then that you may have a great impact on your future generations, for either good or bad.

What is it then, you must do to ensure the good, not the bad? You must love. Jesus said, “The whole law is summed up in two commandments. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Many men are inadequate when it comes to loving. However, there is nothing more important than loving. If there is nothing more important than loving, it must be a worthwhile pursuit to learn how to love and to pursue it with all your being. Unfortunately, not only are many men inadequate when it comes to loving, but they also have no motivation or thirst to become better at loving.

Hopefully this book will show you what love is and what love is not. It will give you some ideas on how to really love. You have so much power with your love that you should want to use it to its maximum.

Too, you need to be serious about change. Your family should be a major priority. You need to be receptive to God. If these things are not true, this book probably won't help you much. So you may just want to read your newspaper and give the book to someone else or perhaps save it until you are ready.

If you are a woman reading this book, please don't start judging the man in your life. That's not your job. Your job is to respect, encourage and support. Chances are you probably need to do some changing as well, so focus on yourself. Also, remember that your husband or father is probably where he is because of the sins of his father. It's not an excuse, but it may help you to be more understanding.

In the words of scripture's famous love chapter, “If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them, and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn't love others, I would only be making noise. If I had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it do?”

“Even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Living Bible)

## **Chapter One**

### WHAT IS LOVE, ANYWAY?

“...but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Steve is a fairly successful businessman who shows love to his wife and family by being a good provider. He tries very hard to keep his family happy through financial support. He is not abusive, seems to be a pleasant, fair-minded, reasonable man.

His wife, Ann, is a very attractive, intelligent woman, also employed. She is much more uptight and experiences the most pain in the marital relationship. For years she has kept her pain inside, hoping it would go away or that things would change. By the time they came in for counseling they were experiencing conflict on a daily basis. They had not been intimate for months, and Ann stated she no longer felt love for Steve.

The more counseling progressed, the worse things became. Ann began to express more and more of the emotional pain she had been experiencing. It started even before they were married, when Ann became pregnant. That left doubts in her mind as to how much Steve really loved her.

As the marriage progressed, her doubts grew larger. Steve really wasn't a bad guy, but he didn't know how to show love to Ann. The bottom line for Ann was that she didn't feel loved, and she couldn't stand it any more. For thirteen (13) years, she had suffered daily because of not feeling loved, and on top of that she hadn't dealt with the problem so it became worse. Slowly she grew angrier and more bitter.

Steve wanted his marriage to work, and he really wasn't aware that things were so bad. Unfortunately, he had not learned to love or was unwilling to love Ann in ways that she felt it. Last week Ann went to see a lawyer and was moving toward a divorce.

Maybe there's still hope. If Steve could really show love to Ann so she feels it or if Ann could accept the kind of love Steve is offering, then her feelings would change, and maybe this marriage could work.

That is even less likely to happen, however. The blame falls on both of them; Steve for his insensitivity to Ann's needs and unwillingness to meet them; Ann for her inability and unwillingness to express her feelings and needs, thus allowing her anger to build up to this point. It truly is unfortunate.

This scenario is not uncommon: A man, who truly does love his wife and family, but they come to me not feeling loved and are in great pain because of it.

Going back to the original question: what is love? In the case of Steve and Ann, each has a different view. If the two of them can't communicate love to each other in the same language, it's not satisfactory for either. Here's a simple analogy: someone tells you he has \$50,000.00 for you; just go to his office and pick it up. But all the time, he is speaking to you in French, and

you don't understand French. It's the same with love. If it's not communicated in the right language so your family feels it, it will not do much good.

Let's look at the question again. What is love? Is love romance or dependability? Is love a feeling or a behavior? Is love an action or an intense emotion? Is love spontaneous or disciplined? Is love tough or kind? Is love caring or demanding? Is love sexual or non-sexual? Is love giving or taking? Is God love, or is God loving?

The problem with the word love is that there are too many definitions, many of which seem to conflict. All the above are true yet they appear to be opposite. How can that be? How can love be so many different things? Not only are there endless ways to show love, but each loving relationship is different as well. We love our wife differently from our children, friends differently from relatives, job, pets, sports, money, etc. The list goes on, and we love everything in different ways.

For the purpose of this book, let's narrow the focus of our love. Primarily our focus will be on three (3) areas: loving God, loving our spouse, and loving our children. Those must be our priorities. If we are showing love in these areas, then our love will expand to include friends, relatives, neighbors, the hurting and needy, even our enemies. To be successful in loving, however, we must start with God and our families.

Let's take a closer look at love and what it really means. First, it is a verb, which denotes action. We must be "loving," not just "have love for" or "feel love" or "be in love". We must be loving. This is crucial. Perhaps you do love God, your wife and your children. However, it is crucial that they feel your love. If they don't feel your love then it benefits them little. You can love till you're blue in the face, but if your family doesn't feel your love is it doing them any good? They must feel your love.

You may be thinking; that's their problem if they don't feel my love, I still love them. Well, you're right in some ways. At the same time it is their problem, and it will cause them more problems, it's your responsibility to rectify the situation. They desperately need to feel your love if it's going to have a positive impact on their lives.

So how do you get your wife, family and others to feel your love? Part of the problem of not being able to communicate love so others feel it, is our lack of understanding about what love really is.

Webster defines love as "a strong affection or liking for someone or something". Unfortunately our society has bought that limited definition of love; we presume that we love when we have a strong affection or liking for someone. As long as we have an attraction or positive feeling toward a person, we tend to act in more loving ways. If we don't have a strong affection or liking for someone, we tend to act in non-loving ways.

Basically, then, our love will depend on how we are feeling toward someone at a particular point in time. The problem with this approach is that our love becomes limited to how we are feeling,

which is the whole problem with that definition of love. In fact, that definition of love is not only limited, but is actually anti-love or non-love. If love is limited to how you feel, then it's totally self-centered, self-focused and useless to anyone else.

It's no wonder we can't communicate love so that others feel it. We are too focused on what we are feeling, not what others are feeling. There's nothing wrong with having a strong attraction or having feelings of affection for someone. That's great, but there is a lot more to love than just feelings. Love is not only what you feel, love is also what you do that affects how others feel. We need to have a new word in the English language that defines having a strong attraction or liking for someone. We use the word love and that's why there is such a misunderstanding about the real meaning of love.

Love is not what you feel. There is not a word for that. Love is how you interact and what you do in relationship to someone else.

God came up with His own definition of love. He said love is patient, kind, protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. Love does not envy, boast, easily anger, delight in evil. Nor is it rude or self-seeking, and it keeps no record of wrongs.

We will take a closer look at each of these attributes later, but this scriptural definition says nothing about a strong attraction or liking for someone. It is just not relevant to love. That's why Jesus said we could even love our enemies. Real love has nothing to do with how we feel, but has everything to do with how we act.

Having a strong attraction or liking for someone may be a beginning to loving them. But real love must go beyond feeling. If you accept Webster's definition, your love may be dependent on your feelings, making love relatively unstable. You are able to love only if you have a strong attraction or liking for someone.

The problem comes when you temporarily lose that strong attraction or liking. When that happens you may then believe you have lost your love, so you stop your loving behavior. Many people believe that it's not possible to love unless there are correlating feelings to go along with the action. That's simply not true. Yes, it's much harder to love, but it's still possible to love even when you don't have a strong attraction or liking.

Take for example your dating days. Think about the numerous relationships you had. Why did those relationships end? There is a multitude of reasons, but most ended when the feelings of love ceased or lessened. We often end relationships because we don't have a strong attraction or liking for someone anymore.

Fortunately, marriage and parenting are different. We make a commitment to love, which means that even at times when we don't have a strong attraction or liking for our spouse or children we will still choose to love them. We love them by how we interact with them, not by how we feel towards them.

We cannot base our love on Webster's definition; it will be insufficient for others as it is for ourselves. It is not possible for anyone to maintain love at that level of consistency.

It is true God is love. And because God is love, He can maintain love eternally at a consistent level independent of others or how He feels. God can love because He is love. We are human, created in God's likeness, but we are not love. Therefore, we will have to struggle at loving.

Just because we are not love, God does not let us off the hook. In fact that's His main command to us, to love; to be like Him. We will have to work hard at loving because we are not love. God is love, it comes naturally for Him, He doesn't even have to work at it. It's what He is. The good part is that God makes His power to love available to us.

Let's go back to the question, then of how we get our family to feel our love.

We need first to recognize that our love needs focus on them, not on ourselves. If we are focused on how or what we may be feeling, it will take away our ability to focus on others. Love must focus on the object (person) it is directed at or you will miss the target.

I love to play handball, it's my favorite sport. The key to handball is concentrated, focused attention on the ball. Your eyes should never leave the ball regardless of where the ball is or who's hitting it. The best players can even see in what direction the ball is spinning. It takes years of learning to be that focused on the ball.

Now if I have an injury of some sort, which is very common among handball players, what often happens is my focus gets diverted away from the ball to myself. I begin to worry about my injury and try to play so as not to make it worse. The problem is the more I focus on myself, the worse I hit the ball.

It's the same with love. The more focused you are on yourself, the worse you'll be at loving others. Love is what you do in relationship to others, not what's going on inside of you.

Once you've focused your attention on the object of your love, you'll be in a better position to understand exactly what will make them feel loved. That is the second step, learning what a particular person needs to feel loved. Different people need love expressed in different ways. Your responsibility is to figure out what he/she needs in order to feel that you love him/her. To do that will require the following: communication, education and implementation.

### **Communication:**

To really know what your wife or children need to feel your love, you will need to spend time talking and listening to them. Actually you won't have to do much talking, but mostly listening. Probably every day they are telling you what they need, but you haven't heard them.

Just start listening daily and you'll begin to be able to put together what they need from you to feel loved. My son says it when he asks me to play with him. My daughter says it when she

tests me to see if I really mean no when I say no. My wife says it when she gets upset because I'm not home enough. What is your family telling you?

It's also not a bad idea to have your family sit down and make a list of ways you can communicate love to them. To repeat, different people need love in different ways. The best way to find out is to get it straight from them. In chapters 10 and 11 we will look at some specific ideas that may help.

### **Education:**

are your kids in their developmental stage? What do women say are their top five biggest needs? (We'll find the answer later.) How do you show love to a teenage daughter? We all need more knowledge. In order to love effectively, it is important to gain as much knowledge as possible about the subject area. The fact that you're reading this book says you're interested in gaining more knowledge about loving.

Don't stop here. Continue to read, listen to CD's, go to seminars. If you want to become good at something, you're going to need to spend some time at it. Without educating yourself, it's not possible to be very good at whatever you're doing, whether it's loving or playing handball.

### **Implementation:**

This will probably be the hardest to do. To actually change your behavior and love differently is not a job for just anybody. How we are loving others right now is comfortable and familiar to us. We probably grew up seeing this kind of love and receiving this kind of love, now it's how we love. To do something different will feel uncomfortable and maybe even scary. That's what makes it hard to change sometimes. But without implementing new loving behavior, all the communication and education will be for nothing.

Bert is in his fifties (50's), a very intelligent man. Logical, reasonable, persuasive, he is very successful in life, in business, socially, financially, and even appears to have it together spiritually. Bert has one major problem though. His wife and children do not feel loved by him. In fact, they feel so little love that divorce proceedings have started.

Bert had read enough books on the subject to fill a whole shelf. He knew the Bible from front to back. He had communicated with his family constantly about how he could love them more. He even seemed to have a desire to love them.

But with all his knowledge he could not implement any change in his life. He never treated them differently for a significant period of time. For whatever reasons, he was unable to implement loving behavior so his family could feel it.

As you can see, showing love is not so easy; in fact, it can be quite complicated. Many of these issues are discussed in more detail later in the book. For now, you need to (1) see the importance of loving so your family feels it, and (2) begin to perceive love in a different way.

You must be convinced of the importance of loving your family so that they feel it. If you're not convinced, you probably won't agree with the rest of this book. You'll keep telling yourself, "I do love my family". Unfortunately you still have to convince your family, because they are the ones who count. They must feel your love; it doesn't count unless they feel it.

As stated earlier, your love can't be based only on how you're feeling or your love will be insufficient. The focus of love is not on what you're feeling (that becomes self-focused behavior, which is the opposite of love) but on how others are feeling as a result of your interaction with them. Your goal is to interact in such a way that your wife, children and others feel loved. Scott Peck, in his book The Road Less Traveled, makes a pertinent point:

"When we love someone our love becomes demonstrable or real only through our exertion – through the fact that for that someone we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. Love is not effortless. To the contrary, love is effortful..."

"Everyone in our culture desires to some extent to be loving, yet many are not in fact loving. I therefore conclude that the desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will – namely, both an intention and an action."

"Will implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. No matter how much we may think we are loving, if we are in fact not loving, it is because we have chosen not to love and therefore do not love despite our good intentions."

"On the other hand, whenever we do actually exert ourselves in the cause of spiritual growth, it is because we have chosen to do so. The choice to love has been made."

Illustrating the importance of not only being loved, but feeling loved, is a couple who have come to me for counseling. David and Jan (not their real names) entered my office for counseling more than two (2) years ago. An alcoholic, David had trouble controlling his anger (was often verbally abusive and sometimes physically abusive). He also had numerous affairs.

Jan was a codependent, controlling and manipulating. She was also very angry, scared and hurt. She would often take too much responsibility for David's behavior and try to "fix" him.

After filing for divorce, enduring two (2) separations, and continuous conflict and strife, David and Jan's relationship now is working and even working well. What did it take? Both David and Jan needed to change. Jan needed to address her codependent behavior, her ineffective ways. She communicated her needs and allowed David to be responsible for himself and change on his own.

David needed to learn to love. Specifically, he needed to learn to love God, his wife and himself. How did David and Jan change? It wasn't easy and it has taken over two (2) years, but change they did. Both decided to actively seek God through prayer, Bible reading, church, friends and books. They continued individual and marriage counseling as well as working a 12-step

program with a group. Jan educated herself about codependency, utilizing books and principles she had learned. David, using the principles described in this book, learned to love, to be other-focused and less self-focused.

David and Jan still have issues they struggle with just like any other couple, but they have been able to create a more loving relationship.

You can also love. It's your best choice. Not your easiest, but best.