

**He
First
Loved
Vs**

by Mike Harding

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He First Loved Us

We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

The apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:19 that we love God because He first loves us. This verse is the key to the healing of the broken heart. It is the key to the fulfillment of your human nature and the true meaning of your life. It is the only way to have a truly satisfying relationship with God.

Created for love

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
Genesis 1:26-27

Did you know that you were created for love? The Bible says that you were created by God in His image and likeness. That means many things. It means that your life has great value. If God made you, and He made you in His image, you are not junk. You are not an accident, and you are not second-class. You are valuable and precious to God. Your life has meaning and purpose. God has a great plan for you.

Even more importantly, it means that you were created for love. Two verses in the Bible both reveal the nature of God: 1 John 4:8 and 1 John 4:16 both say that "**God is love.**"

There are many other verses in the Bible that illuminate His nature. Psalm 99:9 says that "God is holy." That's true, but "holy" is an adjective; it describes God. Psalm 73:1 says that "God is good." That's also true, but "good" is an adjective; it describes God. **But 1 John 4:8**

and 1 John 4:16 say that "God is love." "Love" is a noun; it defines God!

If God is love, and He created you in His image, then you were created for love. God's purpose in creating you was that He might love you and that you might love Him back. **Your heart was designed to receive love and to give love - with God first, and then with others.** If you are not fulfilling your purpose and your design, you will never be truly fulfilled as a human being.

Every human being, before he or she is damaged in this broken world, has the desire to be loved and to love in return. It is our nature and our design. Where did we get this yearning? From God Himself! **God also has the desire to love and be loved. How do we know this? Because we ourselves have this need, and we were made in the image of God.** Besides that, God is love. The one who loves wants to draw close to the object of his or her affection. Love, by its very nature, wants to give itself and express itself in great goodness and even self-sacrifice, if necessary.

What God wants most is to have a loving and intimate relationship with you. He did not create you to be a servant, although the people that love Him will gladly serve Him. He did not create you just to "do His will", although the people who love Him will gladly do His will. He created you to satisfy the desire and yearning of His heart. He created you to love you, and to receive your love in return.

God created the world with a command from His mouth. He could create anything He wants with one spoken word - well, almost anything. **There is one thing that an all-powerful God could not create with just His command: a love relationship.** A love that is commanded or programmed into us would not be authentic or satisfying. It would be a sham, a meaningless counterfeit.

God **demonstrates** His love to us. (Romans 5:8) He **expresses** His love to us, and He seeks to **draw us** to Himself. (Jeremiah 31:3) He But He never forces His love on us. **God wants an authentic love relationship with you, and He is willing to be the one to love you first.**

Targeted for a broken heart

We live in a broken world.

From the beginning, Satan, a rebel angel with a proud heart and a perverted value system, targeted the relationship between God and mankind. Satan was jealous of the position, the dominion and the love that God had given us. Mankind was easily seduced into an all-out rebellion, a freefall into sin and corruption. Our connection with the God of love was broken. Our hearts shriveled up like raisins. **Disconnected from the source of all love, our hearts became like dry sponges.**

We became a shadow of the noble beings we were meant to be. We were meant to live from hearts of love, motivated by a divine-royal nature in every thought, word and decision. Instead, we became motivated by greed, lust, fear, hate, ego, and pride.

Satan attacked our ability to receive love and to give love. Generation after generation, parents who never received enough love raise children that they don't know how to love. **You can't give what you don't have.** Trusting, childlike hearts learn not to trust anymore. Children learn how to protect themselves from further pain by putting up walls of protection around their hearts. Soft hearts turn cold, stony and hard. Some people bottle up years of pain and live under high pressure, afraid that the cork will someday pop out and that they will have an out-of-control, emotional meltdown.

This world is suffering a deficit of love.

Children grow up, instinctively knowing that they should have been loved, protected, cherished and appreciated. But instead many feel rejected, unsafe and devalued. Rejection, woundedness, shame and bitterness become part of their self-

image, their identity and their personality. They learn to expect rejection; they learn to perceive rejection even when it's not there.

Some children are abused sexually, verbally, physically or emotionally. Children believe what they are told, and they naturally believe that they must deserve the way they are being treated. Children have no choice but to believe that the abuse is somehow their own fault. It must be a reflection of their value and worth. They internalize the message. They learn to reject and hate themselves.

Satan has deceived us into feeling inferior, when in fact he is the inferior one. He is a defeated enemy, put under our feet by the victory of Jesus Christ.

The spirit of rejection

Satan's primary strategy to keep us under control is to convince us that we are inferior, unloved and unwanted. He seeks to get this message, this lie, this stronghold into us at the earliest age possible. That gives him the greatest control over us. In other words, he seeks to get a spirit of rejection into us.

A spirit of rejection is the core belief that we are inferior, unloved and without value. It is what the Bible calls a stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:4). It is an enemy fortress established in our minds, a belief system that opposes the truth of God's love for us and calls it a lie.

A spirit of rejection may also literally be an enemy spirit - a demon or rebel angel - that attaches itself to us through our surrender to the rejection stronghold. This spirit manipulates us like a puppet, replaying old tapes of criticism, rejection or abuse every time that we dare to have hope. With a spirit of rejection, we are one of the

walking wounded. We bear an invisible bruise that never heals, overreacting to every perceived offense or insult.

How do you know if you have a spirit of rejection? You may feel like a spiritual or emotional orphan. You may feel like you are always the outsider, never fitting in, never belonging. You may be full of contradictions: insecure and afraid on the inside, but hard and angry on the outside. You may feel worthless on the inside, but wear a self-important mask on the outside. You may have great difficulty developing healthy, long-term relationships. You may try a hundred different strategies to prove to yourself and to the world that you are a somebody, but there is never any permanent satisfaction. It is always a carrot on a stick.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God..."

In the Old Testament of the Bible, God made a covenant with the nation of Israel. It was a covenant of law. God gave commandments and statutes for Israel to obey. **It was a performance-based relationship with God.** In some ways, it was a planned failure. God knew that fallen mankind could not and would not keep His laws. The laws of God were never meant to save mankind. Giving the Israelites the ten commandments to accomplish their own salvation was almost like throwing a swimming manual to a drowning man. God's laws were only meant to expose mankind's need for salvation and a Savior.

Only one Man ever kept all the commandments of God. It was Jesus Christ. He kept the laws because He was God incarnate. It was His nature to do so.

One of God's commandments was Deuteronomy 6:5 - *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.* Many Christians today believe that they are required and expected to keep this commandment. But only Jesus

loved His Father with all of His heart, soul and strength. Jesus did this because it was His nature to do so.

For the rest of us, this commandment was not meant to save us. It was meant to expose us. It was a standard of perfection that would force us, if we are honest, to confess our inability to love God with our whole heart.

The corrupted human race was separated from the love of God in the rebellion of Adam and Eve. We were incapable of loving God fully, because you can't give what you don't have. We were incapable of loving ourselves or loving others. Our hearts were dry sponges. We were spiritual orphans and rebels.

Besides, God knows that commanded love is not really love at all. He knew we couldn't keep that commandment. He never expected it of us. **What He really wants is for us to recognize that our hearts are broken and empty, that we need His love.**

In the New Covenant, which began after Jesus died for us and rose from the dead, God does not command us to love Him. We are not in a covenant of law. **We are not in a performance-based relationship with God. We are saved by grace through faith.** (Ephesians 2:8-9) We are accepted and saved by believing that Jesus paid for our sins with His own life. He shed His blood on the cross and died as our substitute. He was put in a tomb and rose from the dead the third day. We are saved by believing and trusting that His sacrifice saves us.

When we call on Jesus Christ for salvation, the Spirit of God comes into our hearts and we are born again. We receive forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. We become children of God. And Romans 5:5 says that the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.

In the New Covenant, God does not command us to love Him. Instead, it says that "we love Him, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

The restoration

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...

Luke 4:18

Jesus read His mission statement at the beginning of His public ministry. Quoting from Isaiah 61:1, **He declared that He had come to heal the brokenhearted.** Who are the brokenhearted? They are the ones that recognize their need for love, for healing, for restoration.

How does He heal us? He loves us first!

When a father and mother have a baby, do they command the baby to love them? No, they love the baby first. They hug and kiss the baby. They hold and cherish the baby. They sing to the baby, rock and comfort the baby, and feed the baby. After many years, the baby begins to love them because they first loved the baby.

That's what God does with us now. When you accept Jesus Christ, you are spiritually a newborn baby. You are born of God's Spirit. God is your Father. He loves you.

Children that are raised in an atmosphere of love will thrive. They will become confident and happy and have a healthy self-image. They will believe in their ability to succeed and to have loving relationships. They will believe in their own worth and value.

Children that are raised without enough love will usually struggle with all of those issues. They will secretly feel like orphans, trying to survive in a world where they don't feel wanted.

God doesn't want you to feel like an orphan. He wants you to feel loved. He wants you to feel in your heart the reality of His love.

Many Christians are trying to obey the Old Covenant commandment to love God. They are trying to succeed in a performance-based relationship. But they don't know how to simply open their hearts and let God love them. **They are trying to perform, trying to qualify, trying to earn or deserve a love that can only be freely received.**

Many Christians are like a street orphan that is rescued, adopted and brought into a rich man's home. They see the wealth, the food, and the beautiful clothing. But in their hearts, they cannot believe that any of it is for them. The rich man offers them love and security and a new identity. But they can't help but feel that it is too good to be true. They can't trust. They won't open their little orphan hearts and simply let themselves be loved. They fear that it will all disappear and betray them the moment they try to receive it. They are afraid to embrace a new identity. **They are afraid to trust the unexplainable love of this adoptive father.**

Why do they do this? Because, once you have been hurt, you put walls around your heart. You are afraid to trust. You are afraid of being hurt again. A second round of rejection would hurt way more than the first time! **But, like the adopted orphan, you must take down your walls of protection and let this new Father love you.** You must open your heart and accept this unexplainable love. **You must allow yourself to be embraced and loved!**

I often ask Christians this question: Do you feel loved? Many Christians will answer, "No. I believe He loves me. The Bible tells me so. But I don't feel it."

You know what? You must open your heart and allow God to love you. You must give up your orphan identity and allow yourself to be loved. God offers, but He does not force His love on anyone. If you have put up walls of protection around your heart, you must take them down and allow His love to heal you.

People who allow themselves to be loved by God are the greatest revolutionaries in this world. They are the people that come to truly know God and truly represent God. Everyone else is just trying to be religious.

People who feel loved by God will thrive in every way. They will begin to love and value and respect themselves first. Why? Because I want to love what God loves. If God loves me, I will also love me. Not in a selfish way. But in a healthy way. I will thrive, because people who live in an atmosphere of love always thrive.

People who allow God to love them will, in return, love God more and more every day. They will worship God and serve God and hunger for more of God. They will not be religious. They will be enamored. They will be passionate. They will be genuine.

People that allow God to love them will also begin to love others in a very genuine way. Under the law, God commanded people to love their neighbor as themselves." (Leviticus 19:18) But you cannot give what you don't have. Only people who open their hearts and receive the love of God can begin to love their spouse, their child, or their neighbor in a genuine way. We love out of the overflow of God's love for us.

When we receive Christ into our hearts, when we are born again, we are reconnected to the original source of all love, because "God is love."

When we bring our hearts to God, like dry sponges, and ask Him to pour His love into our hearts (Romans 5:5), He begins to fill our hearts up with divine, unconditional love. We are transformed. We are healed. We are restored. We become truly able to love God, to love ourselves, and to love others. Jesus said that we would even love our enemies. (Matthew 5:44) That is only possible when we open our hearts to His love. **You can't give what you don't have. You must receive love to give love.**

God's love is proactive. He sets His love upon you. (Deuteronomy 7:7) He paints a target on you and says, "I am going to love you. I have decided." People that receive God's love also become proactive in their love. They are imitators of God. (Ephesians 5:1) They walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.

Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them, "*Freely you have received, freely give.*" (Matthew 10:8) **In the Kingdom of God, we must learn to freely receive and freely give.** You can't give what you don't have. To give love, you must receive love. In God's family, everything is received by grace through faith. (Ephesians 2:8)

We need to learn to drink in God's love. We need enlarged hearts, hearts capable of receiving more love and giving more love. We need to become bigger on the inside than we are on the outside. **We need to spend time with God just drinking in His love and exploring His heart for us.** This may feel like a waste of time when we think we should be "doing" or "performing", but sitting and absorbing God's healing love is a really good use of our time. It is how we begin to fulfill our purpose and our design.

Before Jesus went to the cross, we see how several of His disciples reacted to His love. **Judas, for whatever reason, could not or would not receive Christ's love.** He became the betrayer. His life ended tragically. The one thing he most needed, he could not or would not receive.

Peter swore in his own strength that he would not deny Jesus. But he denied Jesus. When he realized what he had done, he cried bitterly over the revelation of his own weakness. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter and tenderly restored him.

But there was another disciple named John. John chose to receive Jesus' love. John chose to identify himself as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."* (John 13:23, John 20:2, John 21:7, and John 21:20)

Didn't Jesus love all His disciples? Of course He did. But Judas chose not to receive it. Peter tried to perform in his own strength and failed. **Only John chose to freely receive Jesus' love. Only John chose to build his identity on the fact that Jesus loved him.**

At the last supper, before Jesus went to the cross, John was actually "leaning on Jesus' bosom". He was leaning into Jesus' love. He was freely receiving Jesus' love. John was the only disciple that followed Jesus to the cross and stayed faithful through the crucifixion and resurrection. John was later called "the apostle of love". John is the one who wrote, "God is love."

Receive His love now

We love Him, because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

If you have never received Jesus Christ as your Savior, or if you are not sure, please pray this prayer now:

"Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. You died on a cross paying for my sins. You rose from the dead. Jesus, I believe in You. I invite You into my heart, right now and forever. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer, you are now saved. You are a child of God. You are forgiven. You have eternal life.

If you have been hurt or wounded or rejected, choose today to open your heart to God's love. Choose today to take down your walls of protection. Choose to trust God. Choose to let Him love you. Pray something like this - in fact, you might want to pray this prayer every day while God is healing you and filling you with His love:

"God, I bring You my heart. I am one of the brokenhearted. My heart is like a dry sponge. I have put up walls of protection around my heart. I have had a stronghold of rejection in my life. I have had a spirit of rejection. I want to be free. I want to be healed. I want to fulfill my purpose and destiny. I want to receive love and give love. I open my heart to You now. I take down my walls of protection. Just as You have forgiven me, I freely forgive all the people who have ever hurt me. Come now and pour Your love into my heart. I allow You to love me. I give You my orphan heart, and I allow You to call me Your beloved son/daughter. (Luke 3:22, John 17:23, 1 John 3:1) I accept my new identity as Your beloved child. In the name of Jesus, I command the spirit of rejection to get out of my life, out of my identity, and out of my self-image. Like the apostle John, I choose to identify myself as one that Jesus loves. As You fill me with Your love, I will love You, I will love myself, and I will love those around me. Please heal and enlarge my heart so that I may freely receive and freely give Your love. Thank You, Father God, that You first loved me. Amen."



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