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Nothing Without Love

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Nothing Without Love

Day 16

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The truth of those words crashed down upon me one hot, August morning. It had been about ten years since God had poured out His love on me that unforgettable evening as I lay on the floor of the church.

From Scripture, I understood the importance of loving God and neighbor. So, like a “good” Christian, I was trying my hardest to do what I absolutely knew God wanted me to do—to be kind, caring, and compassionate like He was.

But in the years since that night at church, I’d failed miserably. I’d had an affair. How could I have done such a terrible thing—especially after experiencing God’s love in such a dramatic way? I felt as though I’d spit in God’s face and told Him He wasn’t enough. I had sinned horribly. I felt like I didn’t deserve to be loved.

“God is love.” I knew that intellectually. But I simply couldn’t accept it personally—down in the core of myself. I felt that I needed to clean myself up before I could be acceptable to God. So I shut myself off from relationship—receiving what I felt I absolutely did not deserve.

In order to keep from sinning in such a horrible way again, I put all sorts of additional, Christian-sounding rules on myself: “Mary, you have to pray more.” “You have to walk in the Spirit.” “Don’t ever be alone with a man except your husband.” Like a modern-day Pharisee, I plastered myself with rules to prevent sin from coming out.

I couldn't fathom that, after what I'd done, God could still love me. In my twisted thinking, I believed I had to earn God's love by obeying His commands ... so I could prove I loved Him ... so He would then want to be in relationship with me. I had no understanding of the spirit, soul, and body, and that the core need of my soul was to know God's love—the very love I had shut myself off from by thinking my sin disqualified me.

This was the condition of my life that hot, August day ... when during a morning Bible study with a dear, older friend, she leaned forward and said, "Mary, can I tell you something?" The intensity of her eyes told me it was important.

"Yes," I said.

Her blue eyes looked into mine. "Mary, you don't love."

The words hit me like a freight train. It was true—horribly true. *I didn't love*. The first few verses of 1 Corinthians 13 flashed through my mind. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal..." I didn't love and love was the most important thing. I was nothing—nothing but a loud, irritating noise-maker.

I was failing miserably at the most important thing in life. The affair had ended years ago. I'd told my husband and he had forgiven me. We were going to church as a family and had youth group meetings in our home. Multiple Sclerosis was less of an issue for me and I was able to care for our children and do volunteer work for a mission organization. I was trying so hard to be good and love God and others. But life wasn't working and I didn't know why.

I came out of my chair and lay face down on the living room carpet. What was wrong with me anyway? Why couldn't I love?

In total desperation, a prayer gushed out. "God, fix the wrong in me. I want to love. Whatever it takes."

Ponder for a Moment

Consider a time in your life when you felt you didn't deserve to be loved. What made you feel that way?

Do you think God agreed with your opinion of yourself as being undeserving of love? Why or why not?